

Wild 137

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AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE



Departments

- 4 From the Editor**
Facebook fodder, cash for photos and breaking the ice
- 6 Wildfire**
Pricey snowfields, dogs in state forests and horse riding in the NSW wilderness get your goat this issue
- 9 Wild Shot**
A makeshift kitchen in the Snowy Mountains
- 10 Info**
Insider viewpoints from the Queensland Rogaine Association and Aurora Expeditions, plus whale watching walks and nature therapy
- 16 New & Noteworthy**
A round-up of new and upgraded gear for your wishlist
- 18 Green Pages**
Examining the foundations of national parks, a Blue Mountains guide on his green lifestyle, and Bob Brown enters the fight for the Tarkine
- 24 All Things Great & Small**
Leadbeater's possum and forest management come under the microscope
- 26 Wildlife**
The plight of the little penguin troubles Quentin Chester
- 30 Nature of the Beast**
Steve Van Dyck gets to the bottom of our affection for orcas
- 38 Folio**
The many shapes and shades of Western Australian wildflowers
- 64 Track Notes**
Megan Blandford samples five of Kangaroo Island's short walks
- 64 Tried & Tested**
We flex our digital muscles with nature and adventure-themed apps for your smartphone
- 73 Reviews**
George Monbiot's *Feral*, tales from the Pacific Crest Trail and a climbing guide to the Grampians

Features

28 Profile

Fern hunting gets Daniel Ohlsen into some tight spots

32 Winter wonderland

Elsbeth Callender straps on the snowshoes in Canada's Yukon territory

42 River less travelled

Tasmania's Denison and Gordon rivers bewitch Ro Privett

48 Land of light and silence

The world-famous Larapinta Trail lives up to the hype for Christina Armstrong

54 Recall of the wild

Lapsed bushwalker James Stuart enjoys taking the long way in Kosciuszko National Park

58 Best places to raise outdoorsy kids

Australia's family-friendly towns with adventure on the doorstep

62 Drying times

Andrew Davison on the delights of dehydrating your own food

74 Portrait

Indigenous tour guide Sonja Jeffrey on walking ancient trails and kayaking in Far North Queensland

Wild

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WARNING

The activities covered in this magazine are dangerous. Undertaking them without proper training, experience, skill, regard for safety, and equipment could result in serious injury or death.



Cover Ro Privett makes his first stroke in the wild Denison River
Dan Kozanis

Contents First light on dune fields at the Jarkins wilderness coast, view to the Norfolk Range, TAS.
Rob Blakers

To compensate for my wintery preoccupation, I have filled this issue with tales from balmy Far North Queensland and the sun-baked Larapinta Trail

Snow, sun and fun for the family

Winter isn't even over and I'm already mourning the end of the snow. I check the ski resort webcams every few hours and smile inwardly every time I hear someone in Melbourne moans about the cold. Ever since I visited Santa in Finnish Lapland as a child I've been obsessed with the white stuff and its satisfying crunch underfoot. And I know I'm not alone – just look how much fun the guys on page nine are having, and tell me you wouldn't feel as short-changed as our intrepid snowshoer Elspeth Callender if you had to swap the Yukon wilds for an air-conditioned motel room (p32). For all the restrictions and discomfort that snow can bring with it, adventurers and dreamers are drawn to frozen landscapes and their hidden dangers like magnets. At least that's what struck me when I chatted to mountaineer Tashi Tenzing recently, who has spent years guiding Aussies in Antarctica, or when I sat in a packed-out Banff Mountain Film Festival screening of *Crossing the Ice*.

To compensate for this wintery preoccupation, I have filled this issue with tales from balmy Far North Queensland (p74) and the sun-baked Larapinta Trail (p48), as well as some green-hued eye candy from unexplored plant habitats.

I hope our cover story from the wild waters of south-west Tasmania transports you to those untouched corners captured so brilliantly by photographers Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis, and look forward to seeing your own wildflower images to rival Claudette Pope's multicoloured macro collection (p38).

Get snap happy for QPWS

Speaking of life behind the lens, Wild is once again the proud partner of the annual Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's

Better Outdoors photography competition. If you think you've got a cash-prize worthy pic taken in Queensland along the theme of 'Under the stars', 'On the edge', 'Wet & sometimes wild', 'Natural wonders', 'Hitting the trails' or 'Learning outdoors', make sure you submit it for consideration by October 8. In line with our own mission to inspire more young people to get outdoors, there's also a student category. Full entry details for the comp, which is being run by the Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation, can be found at wild.com.au if you search 'photo'.

Who doesn't love a list?

Those of you who have been watching our Facebook page for our winter warmer giveaways (over \$500 worth of gear by the way) will know that we love a good environmental meme or cute wild animal pic. Taking inspiration from Daniel Allen's *The Nature Muggie* (reviewed on p73) and the as-yet-unnamed 'blobs of jelly' animal recently discovered in the waters off south-east Tasmania, I thought I'd share my five favourite species discovered in the past five years (a photo gallery can of course be found on Facebook);

1. No to the mine snake (*Sibon nebulosus*)

This snail-eating snake made the top 10 new species of 2013 list released by the Arizona-based Institute for International Species Exploration earlier this year (top10species.org). Its quirky name refers to the fact that ore mining in the Serranía de Tabasará mountain range in Panama is degrading its habitat.

2. World's smallest vertebrate (*Paedophryne amauensis*)

This magically minuscule frog from New Guinea is a mere 7.7 millimetre long

when full grown, which is smaller than a two dollar coin.

3. Night-blooming orchid (*Bulbophyllum nocturnum*)
This was the first night-blooming flower recorded among more than 25,000 known species of orchids.

4. Crikey snail (*Crikey stevini*)

This rare tree snail found in north Queensland was brilliantly named after the famous crocodile hunter for its khaki-coloured shell.

5. *Phallus drewesii* (no common name)
This five-centimetre-long stinkhorn fungus, which hangs limp because it grows sideways, is embarrassingly named after scientist Robert Drewes.

In the spirit of the top-10 list, we've also had a bit of fun with a round-up of Australia's most family-friendly towns with adventure on the doorstep (p58). If you disagree with our selection, let me know which towns you think deserve a mention on wild@primecreative.com.au.

Win a Wild library!

Missed a couple of issues in the last 32 years? Fret not, we're giving away one full back catalogue (including over \$800 worth of Track Notes) if you can tell us your favourite section of the magazine and why in 20 words or less. The deadline's October 31 and you know where to reach me!

Carlie

Carlie Trotter
Editor



Wild

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Publisher John Murphy, Prime Creative Media

Editor Carlie Trotter carlie.trotter@primecreative.com.au

Contributors Rob Blakers, Ro Prvett, Dan Kozaris, James Dryburgh, Bob Brown, Geoff Mosley, Steven Pearce, David Lindenmayer, Quentin Chester, Rob Diteasa, Steve Van Dyck, Elspeth Calder, Claudette Pope, Christina Armstrong, James Stuart, Andrew Davison, Megan Blandford, Aaron Flanagan, Craig Fardell, Wayne Murphy

Advertising & Sales Gayle Shapcott gayle.shapcott@primecreative.com.au
Group sales manager Brad Buchanan

Art director Michelle Weston michelle.weston@primecreative.com.au

Administration manager Hayley Richert hayley.richert@primecreative.com.au

Subscriptions Gordon Watson subscriptions@primecreative.com.au

Accounts Brooke Radle accounts@primecreative.com.au

Design & Production Blake Storey, Alice Ewen, Sarah Doyle

Special Advisers Brian Walters, Stephen Bunton, John Chapman, Andrew Cox, Grant Dixon, Geoff Law

Founder Chris Baxter OAM

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All correspondence to:

Prime Creative Media

11-15 Buckhurst St

South Melbourne

VIC 3205

Australia

Phone 03 9690 8766

Fax 03 9682 0044

Email wild@primecreative.com.au

Website wild.com.au

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Issue 136, July-Aug 2013

FOR PET'S SAKE

I was disappointed to see your article promoting taking dogs into state forests (Wild issue 136). State forests contain wild animals and should not be under threat from hikers with off-the-leash animals. The article was an affront to all conservationists. Monitoring by state forest staff is impossible because hikers will inevitably take their animals off the leash. Possums, wombats and koalas are threatened already and this promotion by your magazine was unethical and environmentally unsustainable. I would like to see less promotion of human structures or so-called glamping in national parks. National parks are primarily for conservation and ecology preservation, not unsustainable human-centred activities. Our activities should leave almost no trace.

David Hufton,
Caringbah, NSW

EQUINE INVASION

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness alerts Wild readers to the NSW government's proposals for horse riding trails within declared wilderness. Five riding tracks are being developed for a two-year trial period through up to eight declared wilderness areas, in such iconic places as the Pilot in Kosciuszko National Park and Woila Creek in Deua National Park. Chainsaws, machetes, axes and paint have already been used along the proposed routes. Riders claim these routes are heritage and that this clearing and marking is 'maintenance', regardless of the protection these areas have under the 1987 Wilderness Act. Most alarming is that at least part of this pre-emptive clearing was performed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Wilderness Act specifies that reserve management must prevent or restore environmental disturbance. A large number of scientific papers provide strong evidence that the riding of domestic horses in natural areas will spread weeds, damage native vegetation, and cause soil loss and stream bank erosion. Further, the government's strategic directions document shows that a large number of riding tracks have been proposed across the

parks estate. Riders have secured government agreement that scientific proof of actual impacts must be provided before any specific horse riding activity can be restrained, which inverts the precautionary principle. I urge others to protest this abuse of due process and irresponsible reserve management by writing to the premier.

Keith Muir,
Via email

NOT HORISING AROUND

I bushwalk as well as ride and my appreciation of the bush came out of trail horse riding from a young age. I'd like to reassure those with misconceptions about the impact of horse riding that members of the Australian Trail Riders Association are not asking for wholesale access or unlimited numbers in national parks. We are happy the government is taking a cautious approach and think it will be understood that riders who abide by a code of conduct pose no great risk. Riders have been allowed conditional access into Victorian national parks for decades and we want to work with the NPWS to implement a sophisticated monitoring program for the proposed trails, which will all use pre-existing tracks. I think there is some conflation of the impact of brumbies and domestic horses, and a lot more work to be done to clarify their respective impact. Trail riders are comparatively few compared to other user groups, with only 3,500 ATHRA members nationally, and we would argue our impact is low. The trail simply seeks to open inaccessible portions of the Bicentennial Trail, which has been a big drawcard for bushwalkers and riders alike since 1988.

Mitch Kemp
Via email

FREE HEEL LIVING

Congratulations on the whole of Wild 136 and the photo of the telemark skier in particular. The interview with Vinny Antony was also excellent. Mt Stirling is a wonderful place to tele in September and October. I love Falls Creek too, but have been turned off telemarking there because of the ridiculous bureaucracy of needing a lift ticket to ride one chairlift to access the back slopes. We are banned from skiing up through the village and what used to be called Panorama without a ticket even if we are not using the lifts, while the gate across the Rocky Valley Dam is locked so we have no car access. I understand this is because cars may break the bitumen surface driving across the dam wall in late winter or early spring? So well done Mt Stirling (you are much closer to Geelong anyway), to the photographer and skier on p.11, and to Vinny – sounds like a great life.

Brian McKay
Geelong, VIC

FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS

Trevor Fowler: Feeling old 'cause I remember a 1984 cover of Wild!

Vivienne Holman: Wild 136 features a favourite haunt of ours in Croajalingalong Surf, freshwater, sand dunes, midges and lots of happy memories – just a long drive from QLD.

SA Rogaining Association: An excited first-timer has asked "thumb compass or plate-based compass?" What do you think?

We are Wilderness: Shinrin-yoku (Japanese noun. A visit to the forest for relation. Literally: forest bathing.)

@hikingfiasco: Interesting find in my garage: Oct 1996 edition of Wild. Cost \$6.95. Not much different now!

@SarahRees: Working the weekend (again) to protect our #leadbeaterspossum and habitat. The #economy is useless without #environment

@chrismunnphoto: #Whiteout conditions at Falls Creek today: Crossing the Rocky Valley dam wall with falling #snow and a strong wind is simply #awesome.

BUSHWALKING TIP



When trapped overnight in the bush by floodwater recently I discovered that disinfectant gel adheres better to drenched kindling and stays alight longer than firefighters and the rubber strips normally recommended in rainy weather. Hopefully, fellow readers won't ever need to use this tip.

Helen Stones
Via email



For her tip, Helen wins a Deuter Exosphere sleeping bag worth \$289. The Exosphere boasts Thermo ProLoft filling, water repellent areas at the head, sides and feet, and elastic chamber seams offering 25 per cent stretch to ensure a warm, dry and comfortable sleep.

Reader's letters are welcome (with sender's full name and address). A selection will be published here.

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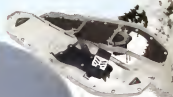
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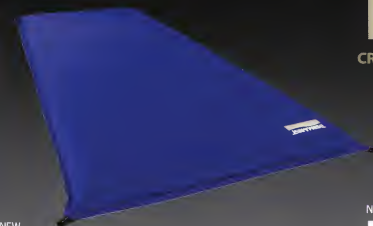


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SYDNEY SEYMOUR: 14, 15, 16 Nov Seymour Centre

CAIRNS: 16 Nov Cairns Civic Theatre
CANBERRA: 17, 18, 19 Nov National Film and Sound Archives
ADELAIDE: 20 Nov Capri Theatre
KATOOMBA: 20 Nov The Edge Cinema
MELBOURNE: 21, 22, 23 Nov RMIT Capitol Theatre
BRISBANE: 26, 27, 28, 29 Nov Brisbane Powerhouse
LAUNCESTON: 30 Nov The Tramsheds

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Alpine brew



Photographer Warren Chate writes: *This was taken on the lower flanks of Mt Twynam in the snow kitchen we dug to keep out of the wind. When I asked what my mates thought of my famous alpine brew (two parts Nestle Alpen Blend chocolate powder, two parts milk powder, one part caster sugar, boiled snow) they said: "Probably wouldn't taste this good on a tropical island."*



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Tenzing treks spread preservation message

Mountaineer and trek leader Tashi Tenzing has launched a series of walking tours to educate travellers on the cultural and geological heritage of the Himalayas



Tashi Tenzing, grandson of Everest pioneer Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and a three-time summiter himself, has received a steady stream of enquiries from Australia since launching small-group treks in Nepal and Bhutan in partnership with Sydney-based Aurora Expeditions earlier this year.

Forward bookings for a 'comfort trek' of the Everest region, staying in lodges owned by Tenzing, and a tented trek on Bhutan's Druk Path indicate bushwalkers are looking for an insider viewpoint of Himalayan culture.

Tenzing said: "Everest is in my blood and I have been very lucky to watch the curvature of the world come round from its summit, so it is humbling to be able to share my knowledge of the mountains as my job."

Also an experienced Antarctic expedition leader, Tenzing said one of his favourite parts of guiding is being able to educate people on the fragility of wild regions.

"We take you into the heart of the wilderness and make you realise how fragile these places are

and how the global warming is affecting them so you can take that message home," he explained.

"I've been playing with glaciers and ice and crevasses for a long time so I see the changes at the three poles – the Arctic, Antarctic and Everest – and I make a point of showing people the melting glaciers of the Himalayas."

He also said Bhutan, which is known for its strict conservation laws, should be on every walker's

bucket list because it truly is the "last Shangri-La".

Having recently completed Bhutan's notorious 400-kilometre Snowman Trek, Tenzing said the thrill of leading tours is giving people the confidence to achieve something they never imagined they could.

He added: "People who choose Aurora Expeditions all have hiking or climbing experience, though you don't have to be super-fit for some of our treks, and it's wonderful to watch them pushing their limits."

"I loved seeing one 70-year-old woman surprise all the youngsters on a trip I took to the top of Mt Kilimanjaro."

Trekking is a spiritual experience for Tenzing, who believes he fits in well in Australia because Australians are as relaxed as the Nepalese.

"When I am standing on Everest with no more steps to take, and I think about my family's history in the mountains, I feel very blessed," he told *Wild*.

Besides the new treks and ever-popular Antarctica cruises, Aurora Expeditions has also reported a surge in interest in its new Alaska itinerary. Rival operator World Expeditions has also expanded its Americas offering for 2014, adding an introductory mountaineering course in the Canadian Rockies and the Great Patagonian Traverse.



Classic Everest trek
Photo: Aurora Expeditions

Outback marathon draws record numbers



Photo: Australian Outback Marathon

Around 300 runners from 20 countries took part in this year's Australian Outback Marathon, with Goulburn man Kerry Baxter making it home first in three hours and seven minutes.

The boutique race, which is hosted by Ayers Rock Resort each July, attracts runners of all abilities to compete in marathon, half marathon, 11-kilometre and six kilometre events within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and is estimated to inject \$500,000 into the local community. Race founder Michael Walton, who also runs specialist tour operator Travelling Fit, said: "We want people to experience all the wonders we did the first time we visited."

The course takes in hard-packed fire trails, soft sand and unsealed roads, with water tents every three kilometres.

Each year, 40 schoolchildren from the isolated town of Yulara receive sponsorship to compete while non-local entrants are required to stay at least two nights' accommodation to support tourism in the Northern Territory.

Marathons and adventure races in iconic natural landscapes, including the upcoming Great Barrier Reef Marathon in November, are seen to be growing in popularity in Australia and overseas.

Rising whale numbers putting our national parks on map

Whale-watching walks are helping to fuel conservation around Australia

With the migratory humpback whale population of New South Wales and Queensland up around 14 per cent each year, national park staff are encouraging visitors to make the most of coastal walking trails for whale-watching.

Each year, humpback and southern right whales can be spotted as close as 200 metres from the coast as they return south between September and November, while walkers in Kamay Botany Bay National Park were treated to the rare sight of a blue whale off Sydney back in July for the first since 2009.

Geoff Ross, marine fauna coordinator for the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, said the Yena Track in Botany Bay and the Royal National Park coastal track are among the best places to spot whales late morning or early afternoon.

He also said that volunteers are playing an increasingly important role in scientific monitoring of the animals.

"The work of the volunteer whale counters at Cape Solander is extremely vital to environmental preservation, with 16 volunteers recording more than 670 hours in whale observations so far this year," he added.

In Western Australia, the growing popularity of

land-based whale-watching helped to secure the declaration of the Great Kimberley Marine Park earlier this year.

The park will envelop five smaller parks across 30,000 square kilometres between Talbot Bay and the Northern Territory border when it is

finalised early next year.

John Carey, from conservation organisation The Pew Charitable Trust, said ecologically-based tourism was the solution for protecting "one of the few remaining unspoiled natural places left on Earth".



Whale breaching in WA
Photo: Annabelle Sander

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60 Seconds with Tony Scott

President of the Queensland Rogaine Association



How did you get into the sport of rogaing?

I did my first rogaing with my mum when I was 15. I remember we got a bit lost after dark, but I really enjoyed being around the campfire and

discussing routes with the other competitors. We run a training day and mini rogaing close to Brisbane each year, but most first-timers just show up and have a go with a friend who's done it before.

What is the role of the association?

You have to join your state association for insurance reasons but the sport is entirely run by volunteers to keep entry fees low in comparison to adventure racing. Each year we run around 10 events between one and three hours' drive from Brisbane, plus about six events near Cairns. After competing in a few events we ask people to put their hand up to help, with the catering for example. The Australian Rogaining Association looks after rule changes, such as dealing with smartphones.

Do any misconceptions surround the sport?

The common misconceptions are that you have to run for the whole event or spend the whole 24 hours in the bush; I hardly run at all and at night you can come back to your tent for a red wine if you want. You don't have to be super-fit, you just have to enjoy being out in the bush. All ages up to 'ultra-veteran' can take part and about 35 per cent of rogaing are female.

What are your season highlights?

The atmosphere at the Australasian Rogaining Championships (which took place near Cairns in June) was brilliant. We started planning it a year in advance to create a map of high enough standard and had 80 teams competing, half of which came interstate as well as a few from New Zealand. The 2016 World Championships will be in the East MacDonnell Ranges.

How do you attract new blood?

Queensland sends two teams to the university championships every year thanks to the Nigel Aylott Memorial Sports Foundation and we've easily been filling the 100 team spots for our adventure games events, which combine kayaking and mountain biking. Our event organiser Liam St Pierre has the next few years

planned out. When adventure racers started entering rogaing it was a case of tortoise and the hare, but the worrying thing is that they've improved their navigation skills and started beating us.

Where was your most memorable rogaing?

Last year's Australian Championships in the Flinders Ranges is a favourite because the country is so beautiful. I remember getting to the top of a ridge at 9pm under a full moon when the stars were so bright that I was able to turn my torch off and watch other teams making their way around the course.

Any tips for first-timers?

Events tend to be won and lost in the planning stages. You've got to have options for picking up extra checkpoints if you're ahead or taking a shortcut if you fall behind, and you have to think about where you want to be at night because certain country is easier to navigate in the dark than others. When choosing a partner, it's important you have the same level of fitness and ambition. Ideally, you pick up on each other's navigation mistakes and can concentrate when your partner is feeling tired.

qldrogaing.asn.au

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sa.rogaine.asn.au

The Stampede (Woodford) BR
14 September, QLD
thestampede.com.au

ACT Rogaine Champs 8/24hr R
21-22 September, ACT
act.rogaine.asn.au

Adventure Sprint Adventure
Race M
29 September, NSW
iadvventure.com.au

Kathmandu Adventure Series
12/24hr M
21 September, NSW
kathmandu24hour.com.au

Nanga Challenge M
21 September, WA
ascot.canoe.org.au

Surf Coast Century BR
21 September, VIC
rapidascent.com.au

Spiny Cray Ultra BR
22 September, QLD
adventuresporting.info

Yurrebilla Trail
Ultramarathon BR
22 September, SA
sarrco.asn.au

October

Great Amazing Race M
5 October, VIC
greatamazingrace.com.au

Upper Murray Challenge M
5 October, VIC
uppermurraychallenge.com.au

Fitzroy Falls Fire Trail
Marathon BR
5 October, NSW
fitzroyfallsmarathon.com

Great Adventure Challenge M
12 October, QLD
greatadventurechallenge.com.au

Twin Peaks Challenge M
12 October, NSW
centauroutdoorerevents.com.au

Mainpeak Colliie Adventure
Race M 12 October, WA
adventureceausstralia.com.au

The Great Ocean Walk 100s BR
12 October, VIC
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Freedom Trail Run BR
12 October, NSW
summerofcycling.com

Adventurethon Coffs
Harbour M 12-13 October, WA
adventurethon.com.au

Freyinet Lodge
Challenge M
12-13 October, TAS
freyinetchallenge.com.au

Adrenation M
19 October, NSW
adrenation.com

Great Adventure Challenge M
19 October, NSW
greatadventurechallenge.com.au

Spring 12hr Rogaine R
19 October, WA
wa.rogaine.asn.au

Heysan Trail Ultramarathon
BR 19 October, SA
sarrco.asn.au

NSW Rogaine Champs R
19-20 October, NSW
nswrogaining.org

Victorian Rogaine Champs
R 19-20 October, VIC
vra.rogaine.asn.au

Washpool World Heritage
Trails BR
20-October, NSW
traq.org.au

Lake Mountain Skyrun BR
20 October, VIC
runningwild.net.au

Blackwood Marathon Relay M
26-October, WA
mccays.com.au

Kings Valley Challenge M
26-October, VIC
kingvalleychallenge.com

The Stampede
(Wandin Park) BR
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thestampede.com.au

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Rab

Reader column

Can nature help us heal?

James Dryburgh tells how he retreated into nature to deal with his grief after the loss of a friend in a kayaking accident

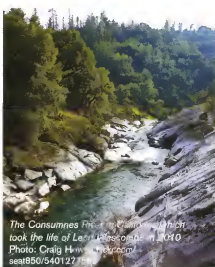
The last time I stood waiting to board the ferry to Maria Island, I was with my best friend and fellow boy scout Leon. I hated Scouts; were it not for Leon I wouldn't have been there. His life was defined by random adventure and humour, never letting tedium triumph.

Two years ago now, just short of 30 years old and weeks before receiving his doctorate for groundbreaking research on cystic fibrosis, Leon died kayaking a river in California. It took weeks to find his body.

As I retraced some of our steps on Maria Island memories of times spent together washed up like flotsam on the shore. A scattered collection of shared moments beginning when I was newly arrived in Tasmania aged six and ending with a drunken embrace as I left for Latin America at 28. Nature is all about life. The very word comes from the Latin *nasci* (to be born). Yet almost instantly, Leon's death stirred in me questions about the natural world. Another friend, who watched Leon disappear, recommended I seek solace in the outdoors, and it seemed fitting that my memories of him be framed by natural scenes as so much of our time together had been spent hiking, mountain biking and jumping off cliffs into the ocean.

As I hiked higher and higher I would start to feel my sadness mingle with exhilaration – death conversing with life. As rain drops touched my skin it reminded me of a wet day on the Overland Track with Leon, both of us frozen mid-stride as a Tasmanian devil crossed our path.

I have always thought of rivers as an exhilarating force, a life force, the veins and arteries of Mother Earth. What could be a greater symbol of life? Whom we lose she finds, in her sacred unspoiled places. Perhaps, I thought, Leon hadn't disappeared but had instead joined with something profound.



The Consumes River in Tasmania, which took the life of Leon Dryburgh in 2000. Photo: Craig Hume (www.craighume.com/seat850/540127.html)

Later, I wondered if grief strips us of all we've created, all the clothes of progress, and returns us to our most fundamental – an intelligent animal in the wild. I began to unpack memories of past deaths; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. It seemed rational that nature offers lessons on the interpretation of death, that in attempting to understand life's greatest certainty we must first look at its fundamental structures. Or maybe all I needed was the tranquillity and self-assertion that venturing into the wilds can give you; the time and space to let my imagination and therefore my memories run free. Grief is coming to terms with the realisation that a particular family of memories will no longer grow.

In quiet moments on Maria Island – a place for people but where nature still rules – I relived the early days of my loss. Like the green ferns punctuating the black carpet of bushfire, time had allowed new life to sprout from thoughts of death. Upon seeing wombats appear at dusk to

feast on grass, I recalled trying to get close to them with Leon when we were children. The sight of dolphins unleashed the wonder we'd shared when a pod passed our swimming place when we were teenagers. When the wedge-tailed eagle soared above the Island I saw the one that swooped Leon's car so closely that, for a second, the view through the windscreen was nothing but dark gold-tinted feathers. Sometimes surrounded by nature you get a sense of ancient collective memory; every cell preserving a complex system of memories sculpted by millennia to build one continuous story.

Nature taking a dear friend, only to comfort me through the loss still confused me. I wondered what filled Leon's mind in his last seconds, and whether those seconds were like hours, whether he relived some of the moments that I have.

'It's how he would have wanted to go,' so many have said, but they don't mean drowning. Their comfort comes from an understanding that he lost life doing what he loved, at one with instinct, in an environment he cherished. Leon was taken by a world that for him was perfect, a powerful force of life that gifted him the rush of adrenalin that erupts with joy at the astonishing certainty that one is truly alive. He died at a moment when his relationship with nature was granting him a heightened state of living, but I don't know whether this makes his death any less tragic.

Within the natural world we find a reality less contaminated, manipulated, deluded. Beaten and stripped of my man-made defences, I surrendered to Maria Island's invitation and for some precious moments, emptied my mind of all but the forest, grassland and sea.

I now see my dearest unspoiled places as temples of personal remembrance and sanctuaries for the ancient connections; where the dead live on.



Read the full column at wild.com.au

SCROGGIN

'Teddy bear' mammal discovered

The first carnivore to be discovered in the Americas in 35 years has been christened as the olinguito, or *Bassaricyon neblina*, by Smithsonian researchers. The one-kilogram mammal, which looks like a cross between a cat and a teddy bear and comes from the same family as the raccoon, is found in the Andean cloud forests of Ecuador and Colombia. It feeds mainly on fruit but also eats insects and small birds. Before a wild olinguito was spotted in Ecuador, specimens of the nocturnal animal had been mistakenly identified as the similar-looking but bigger, less furry and lower-residing olingo.

QLD parks clamp down on injury claims

The Queensland government has announced it will amend the Nature Conservation Act to prevent people suing the state after behaving recklessly and injuring themselves in national parks. National parks minister Steve Dickson claimed last month that \$2m had been paid in compensation over the past 20 years and taxpayers faced \$11.9m in potential payouts for nine outstanding claims. Park users who are injured as a result of lack of maintenance of walking rails, for example, will still be entitled to damages but those who have an accident off-track or as a result of reckless behaviour.

Extreme heatwaves the new norm

The heatwaves that currently affect five per cent of the world's land area are projected to double by 2020 and quadruple by 2020 according to a recent study based on climate modelling in the *Environmental Research Letters* journal. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a statement in August suggesting that the length, frequency and intensity of heatwaves will increase worldwide, with countries in the tropics, Mediterranean and Middle East worst affected. Australia recorded its hottest day, hottest month and hottest season this year.



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Wild wades through the latest gear, from torches and tent pegs to earphones and insoles, so you don't have to



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■ Everybody get footloose

Already well known among podiatrists, Lightfeet insoles have now found their way into outdoor stores in low, medium and high arch supporting options. Designed with Aussie feet in mind, lightweight and breathable Poron cushioning alleviates shockwaves travelling up your legs and limits friction while the polyurethane base makes for advanced durability. \$49.95; lightfeet.com.au



■ Such stuff as dreams are made on

Mont's bushwalking staple, the Tempest jacket, has been updated for greater comfort and less weight this year. In addition to the improved three-piece storm hood with wired visor and drawcords, this classic long-fit rain jacket also features waist-level pockets with hand warmers and two-way water repellent YKK zips. \$499.95; mont.com.au



■ Talk to me Goose

Military sleeping bag specialist Carinthia has put its insulation expertise to good use in the lightweight Downy Ultra Jacket. Featuring a goose down and feather filling inside quilted baffles to hold body heat in the right places, this parka-like jacket has the breathable outer and articulated sleeves you need for activity as well as the microfleece-lined pockets and detachable hood for comfort in unpredictable weather. \$499.95; abenteueralpen.com.au



■ Molten hardware

The latest shell jacket from Mountain Hardwear is compact enough to squeeze into a pocket but also impressively breathable and quick-drying thanks to a patented membrane that spreads and evaporates sweat from the interior evenly. The Plasmic jacket, which is made of ripstop nylon and weighs around 290 grams, also comes with a close-fitting hood and water repellent colour-contrast zip. \$249; mountainhardwear.com



■ Boys in the hood

The North Face has struck upon a water repellent alternative to 600-fill down with its new Thermoball insulation and fashioned it into a nylon puffer-style hooded jacket. Stowable into a hand pocket, the lightweight men's Thermoball Hoodie features elastic cuffs, handwarmers and a cinchable hem. \$300;

thenorthface.com.au



■ To infinity & beyond

Available in blue or green, GSI's famously lightweight Infinity Backpacker Mug boasts a leak-proof Sip-It lid and half-litre capacity. It's made of recyclable polypropylene so is free from nasty chemical resins or tastes and comes with an insulating neoprene sleeve and collapsible webbing handle for easy packing. \$14.95; spelean.com.au

■ The cat's meow

After a decade spent fine-tuning rucksacks and sleeping bags, One Planet has returned its focus to rainwear that can stand up to wear and tear in the Australian scrub and released the long-fit Cat and Dog jacket. This sturdy eVent fabric jacket features a Velcro front closure to protect your map pocket and large cargo pockets, as well as larger-than-average YKK zips and a fully adjustable hood. \$399; oneplanet.com.au



■ Stand out from the pack

The 65-litre Ridgeline Packhah has been created for multi-day trips with vertical and top-loading access, optional interior partition and six exterior pockets. It also features a length-adjustable harness with padded hip belt and a hydration bladder compartment. \$179.95; ridgelineclothing.com.au



■ Accessorise your life

From pegs for pitching in different terrain and magnetic hanging lights (pictured) to reflective guy lines with easy-to-adjust cam ring tensioners, the new range of tent accessories from MSR includes everything you could possibly want for your home away from home. Most of these ingenious items can be used with any brand of tent, and after-care extras such as the tent wash or fabric repair kit are the definition of handy. From \$4.95; spelean.com.au



■ See the light

When it comes to headlamps, they don't come much brighter or more versatile than the Princeton Tec Vizz. Via a single button you can switch between a 150-lumen spotlight, the dimmable flood beam of two white LEDs or the close-range night vision of two red LEDs. This lockable, AAA-powered torch can shine for 11 hours and illuminate up to 90 metres when on full beam, plus it's waterproof to one metre. \$74.95; princetontec.com

Time to make a trip to the Tarkine

As miners prepare for an exploration boom in the Tarkine, Bob Brown urges the rest of us to discover the region



Morning on the Tarkine's Pieman River
Photo: Bob Brown

At the time of writing it's safe to assume that, in choosing one of the big two parties, Australians will vote for mining in the Tarkine this election. What is it that has the majority of people back short-term self-interest over the long-term interest of the planet and its human (let alone other) inhabitants? Perhaps the worry in the public mind is that if it doesn't vote for the assured economic subservience of the big parties to the big end of town, there may be belt-tightening down the line. Maybe stopping start-up companies like Shree and Venture Minerals from gouging tin or iron ore out of the Tarkine wilds will trigger a national recession. Maybe losing the Tarkine is more comfortable than disentangling from the modern fetish for growth economics. What if we could not shop till we drop?

Most will ignore the fact that the profits of the largely foreign-owned mining companies are sent offshore, that opinion polls show most Australians want the Tarkine protected and that tourism and hospitality are the island's real growth industries, providing many more jobs than logging and mining combined.

In the heart of this winter I spent a couple of happy days in the Tarkine. Philosopher Falls was tumbling into its canyon oblivious of its proximity to mining leases. A sea eagle didn't ruffle a feather as our cruise boat floated directly beneath its perch above the Pieman River,

apparently oblivious of the heavy metal pollution coming down the tributary Savage River and our insouciance at having already polluted 59 other Tasmanian rivers. The robins and currawongs in the Mt Lindsay rainforest seemed to have no clue that the nation is about to vote for another open cut mine big enough to swallow the Sydney

Harbour Bridge and its approaches, let alone their tiny nesting sites.

A few days later, the new federal minister for the environment, Mark Butler, flew to Tasmania to get around an injunction obtained on the basis that his predecessor failed in his duty to look at vital departmental advice before approving Shree Minerals' mine in the northern Tarkine. His department had warned that this mine, which could also comfortably swallow that bridge, could spread the Tasmanian devil facial tumour epidemic into the last disease-free stronghold. Butler reapproved the Nelson Bay mine along with a second at Riley Creek. The advice of the National Heritage Council that the Tarkine be listed for protection last year seems like a distant echo.

I accepted the offer to become patron of Save the Tarkine, not because this little local band of Tarkine defenders seems hopelessly outgunned nor because most people (with the exception of the Melbourne electorate) look set to vote in pro-destruction candidates. Not even because the sea eagles, along with the platypuses, wedgetails and devils, don't get a vote – although that does exercise my mind.

I became patron because the Tarkine is not a lost cause. When more Australians get to know what a stunning natural wonderland the Tarkine is, and if more get to see it for themselves, they will step off the footpath to save it. They will even vote for it. The Tarkine is a script for the future of the Earth.



Tasmanian devils have been decimated by a transmissible facial cancer

Let's redraw the battle lines for our parks



Before making our next move in the defence of national parks we should revisit the history of their creation and their role in our lives, writes **Geoff Mosley**

When our first national park was set aside in the coastal section of the northern Woronora Plateau in 1879, some 22 kilometres south of Sydney, it was seen as fulfilling the 'lungs of the city' function that earlier parks within the city had done. The major difference was that this new park covered 14,164 hectares and was largely unaffected by modern development. This turned out to be a giant leap and the beginning of whole new systems of parks in natural environments in the colonies around Australia. By 2010 they covered 39 million hectares.

That first park was dedicated to 'the purpose of a National Park', and has been known as Royal National Park since 1955. The use of 'national' here means that it was to be for all people, in the same way as the National Museum and National Gallery. The US established national parks during this same period, at Yellowstone in 1872 and Mackinac in 1875, but there the word 'national' was intended to make clear that these public parks were on federal land and under federal control. The current crises facing Australia's national parks has led to some, using the American way of thinking, to suggest that unless our federal government takes over control they are not really



'national' parks. This ignores the facts that our constitution provided for crown lands to be retained by the states and that it is internationally recognised that an area may be called a national park irrespective of the management arrangements. The failure of a pre-election attempt to amend environmental law and give the federal government greater powers of intervention was disappointing to many, but glosses over key issues.

Firstly, that the types of pressures currently being placed on parks will exist as long as our society's commitment to economic growth and preference for short-term private profit. This is why it is vital

we encourage a shift in mindset, wherein everyone understands and respects the enormous contribution that national parks can and do make to healthy people and healthy ecosystems.

Secondly, we need to remember that both politicians and members of the public play important roles in this re-education process. Royal National Park came into being largely due to the vision of one politician, Sir John Robertson. The expansion of the parks system owes much to politicians including Tom Lewis, Neville Wran and Bob Carr in New South Wales and Rupert Hamer in Victoria, and it is worth noting that these visionaries came from both sides of the party political spectrum. But it was the public meetings in Melbourne in 1904, 1906 and 1908, some attended by over 1,000 people, that played a major role in the Victorian government's decision to make Wilson Promontory a permanent national park. And the thousands of protesters in Melbourne who ensured the creation of Little Desert National Park in the 1960s.



Read our review of Geoff Mosley's new book, *The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage*, at wild.com.au



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Eco Insight

Wild talks to Tim Tranter of Tread Lightly Eco Tours about his green lifestyle

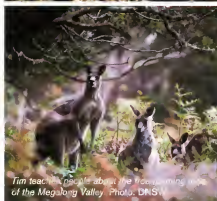
I've lived in the Blue Mountains for 50 years and started bushwalking when I was aged four or five. I knew the opportunity for working as a bushwalking guide was limited so set up my own business, Tread Lightly, as soon as I completed my Advanced Certificate in Ecotourism. Within a year we had achieved the highest possible eco accreditation in Australia, and since then we've added Carbon Action, Respect Our Culture and other sustainable business certifications.

Everything about our tours is modelled on minimal impact, from never needing to follow the same track twice to the speed and manner in which we drive our carbon-reduced vehicles to remote areas, but it goes beyond that. We aim to provide visitors with interpretive information of the highest level, about the flora and fauna, geology and Indigenous heritage for example, in line with our environmental, social and economic responsibilities.

About 90 per cent of the Sydneysiders that I take out have no understanding of the unique ecology of the Blue Mountains region and its World Heritage inscription, such as the fact it contains the world's largest collection of eucalypt



Tim at the office



Tim teaches people about the Woodswallowing Warbler of the Megalong Valley. Photo: DMSV

species. A lot of people do our Valley of the Waters or Grand Canyon bushwalk to get a heads up on the area before heading out themselves.

I'm a wildlife rescuer so we'll sometimes rescue stranded joeys or birds during a tour, and I take tree planting and conservation tours for around 300 students from the US each year. I also take people through the correct ways to deal with snake venom, and how to use basic rescue equipment.

Among my favourite places to walk are the Kedumba Valley and the blue gum forest of the Grose Valley. I've not done much holidaying in the last 20 years but I have just spent a month touring Victoria, which I enjoy for the different scenery and coastal geography.

I've been challenged over the helicopter transfers we offer from Sydney but, until Australia commits to natural gas, a 35-minute journey that involves no rubber, gearbox oils or brake dust is easily more environmentally friendly than the two-hour car journey. Millions of dollars have been invested in the facilities and walking tracks of the Blue Mountains in the last few years, which should give people fresh reason to visit.

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Promises made on NSW parks

The National Parks Association of NSW called politicians to account at a community forum in Sydney last month

Around 100 people attended a forum at the NSW Parliament House last month to hear Robyn Parker, state minister for the environment, Luke Foley, shadow minister, and Greens members Mehreen Faruqi and Dianne Hiles discuss the future of national parks.

Taking questions on a range of conservation issues, Parker stood by Liberal party promises that the state government will not break the law by allowing logging in national parks.

She said: "We have ruled out logging in national parks or tenure swapping; while the logging industry has some issues around sustainability, national parks will not provide the solution."

She conceded, however, that other aspects of the Upper House inquiry into the management of public land that proposed tenure swaps of unlogged parkland for logged state forest would be considered.

To critics of plans to open parks to tourism developments, Parker said: "There are opportunities for enhancing and diversifying national park experiences without impacting biodiversity."

Greens federal candidate Dianne Hiles

responded: "There is no place for this; tourism in national parks is all at the thin end of the wedge."



While the panel agreed that recreational hunters have no place in feral animal control, the government's horse riding in the wilderness trial was accused of violating the principles of the Wilderness Act.

Labor member Luke Foley claimed: "While [horse riding trials are] put forward as a NSW government trial that has limits, it is also about honouring its relationships with minority groups while it spent years in opposition."

Mehreen Faruqi, Greens spokesperson for the environment, said: "We should not be 'trialing' to assess damage that gets done."

Faruqi also said the parks estate requires "much, much more" funding to meet National Reserve System targets.

Parker reminded attendees that the government is investing \$40m into parks management and \$122m into new parks.

Foley said: "The ALP has every intention to build on its legacy when it returns to government by expanding the national parks reserve system, including marine parks."

"A focus on adding parts of the west into the reserve system is politically controversial, but vital," he added.

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Life in the canopy revealed

The study of Australia's air plants is taking scientists into uncharted territory

A researcher from the University of Tasmania is exploring one of the world's last biological frontiers, the rainforest canopy, with the aim of identifying epiphyte species that may be in danger of extinction due to climate change.

Having trained as a tree climber in the US, Australian scientist Jennifer Sanger is now undertaking a unique study into the high-growing mosses, ferns and orchids of northern New South Wales and Far North Queensland. She explains: "Up in the mountains of Australia's subtropics it can be almost like cool temperate rainforest, which will retreat as the Earth warms and cause plants in the canopy to lose their habitats."

By recording and sampling plants over different spatial scales in three different climatic zones, Sanger hopes to identify new epiphyte species as well as the ones that are most at risk from changes in precipitation.

She recently spent two months climbing 50-metre trees in Border Ranges National Park to survey plants over five altitudinal plots ranging from 300 to 1100 metres above sea

level. She says: "There is a mindboggling array of moss species so there's definitely a chance I've discovered new ones, and I was able to identify the heights at which certain orchids tend to grow."

The project aims to provide a detailed set of distribution data for epiphytic inhabitants that have long existed away from prying eyes, invisible from the forest floor.

After beating through undergrowth to get to the base of each tree, moving around the canopy proved to be quite an operation. Sanger says: "We were carrying 60 kilograms of gear between two of us and the wet weather not only made things slippery but also made the ropes swell, which meant that my descender kept getting stuck."

The first challenge is getting a line into the lower canopy using what is essentially a 2.5-metre-high slingshot. This 'big shot' launches a bag with a line attached 30 metres up over a branch and back down to the ground so that a climbing line can then be pulled into the tree. On a good day, says Sanger, it takes

two or three tries to hit your mark, but on a bad one you can be shooting, detangling and retrieving throw line most of the day.

With the climbing line safely secured in a tree, she then used Petzl ascenders to reach the base of the canopy and the double-rope technique used by arborists to manoeuvre around branches and get into the canopy research area. Moving about the canopy itself then involved many hours of throwing, retrieving, tying off and clipping onto the next line.

Sanger recalls one particularly cloudy day when the forest floor was completely obscured beneath her and a strong wind started the branches swaying the tree like a ship rocking on the ocean. "My research is a good excuse to get out in winter and do something a bit adventurous," she shrugs.

Sanger is now working full time at the Queensland Herbarium analysing, identifying and cataloguing more than 400 moss samples, 13 species of orchid and 14 species of fern.



Visit stevenpearcephoto.com/epiphyte for more photos from the project



Jennifer 30 metres up in the lower canopy. Photo: Steven Pearce

Tech-free camping resets body clock

One week of living without electrical light is enough to reset a person's body clock to natural sleep rhythms, a US study has found



A two-week study by the University of Colorado in Boulder has revealed that our internal circadian clocks realign with solar time after a week of exposure to purely natural light.

The experiment involving six men and two women

around 30 years of age showed that the sleep disruption caused by increased use of manmade light in modern life can be counteracted by just one week of camping, regardless of whether you consider yourself an early bird or night owl.

It is widely accepted that our decreasing exposure to natural light together with the difference in colour and intensity of indoor light has negative physiological, cognitive and health consequences. During the experiment in Colorado's Eagles Nest Wilderness, which banned torches and personal electrical devices, the internal biological night of subjects started around two hours earlier than when going about their normal lives.

Levels of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin, and therefore the low point in brain arousal, also offset to occur 50 minutes prior to wake time so that subjects found it easier to get up with the sun.

Wrist monitor data showed that the week of camping exposed subjects to four times the intensity of light they receive during their daily lives.

Standard indoor light is rated at approximately 200 lumens per square metre in comparison to the 10,000 emitted at sunrise, or the 100,000 at midday in the Rocky Mountains in July.

Scientists hope the study will encourage people, especially architects, to give more consideration to the importance of natural light to wellbeing.

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Leadbeater's Possum *Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*

The mountain ash forests of Victoria are the tallest flowering plants on earth, with old growth trees exceeding 95 metres. These spectacular forests are also home to one of Australia's most enigmatic and charismatic animals: Leadbeater's possum. This tiny marsupial weighs about the same as an apple and measures approximately 30 centimetres from nose to tip of its bushy, club-shaped tail. Discovered in the 1860s, it's named after taxidermist John Leadbeater, who preserved the first specimen. Only six specimens were collected until 1909, then the species was not seen again for more than 50 years.

Presumed extinct until it was rediscovered in 1961 about 10 kilometres from Marysville – one of the towns devastated in the 2009 Black Saturday wildfires – it is virtually confined to a 60 by 80-kilometre area known as the Central Highlands. This constitutes one of the most restricted distributions of any Australian mammal.

This rare nocturnal creature lives in groups of up to 12 in a matriarchal colony structure, whereby the dominant female kicks out subordinate females (including adolescent daughters, so that males outnumber females three to one). It engages in group defense to protect a territory of up to three hectares and survives on a diet of wattle and eucalypt sap as well as crickets and spiders.

With a lifespan in the wild of around five years, one monogamous pair per colony will breed two pouch young twice a year at maximum.

As the focus of a 30-year long research and monitoring program by researchers at the Australian National University, Leadbeater's possum is today one of the best understood animals in Australia. We now have a detailed understanding of which parts of a forest are suitable habitat and how the species shares its forest environment with arguably more evolved gliders like the greater glider, yellow-bellied glider and mountain brushtail possum. Researchers have demonstrated that Leadbeater's possum is highly sensitive to the effects of clearfell logging, as well as the impacts of wildfires, because it nests inside old mountain ash trees. The 2009 fires destroyed more than 42 per cent of its known habitat.

Yet ash forests are highly sought after for producing paper and timber, with archived documents from the 1960s showing that the director of the Forests Commission of Victoria ordered places close to where the possum had just been rediscovered be logged. But repeated scientific studies have since demonstrated that clearfelled forests remain unsuitable habitat for up to two centuries, in addition to isolating small populations of animals who are then unable to reach other colonies for reproduction.

Widespread clearfelling, repeated wildfires and post-fire 'salvage' logging have combined to put Leadbeater's possum on a pathway to extinction. The species is now listed as globally endangered, with proposals to have it uplisted to critically endangered. Despite this, successive federal and state governments have done little to try and save the species, which is a faunal emblem for Victoria. Indeed, the reverse is true, with recently approved logging policies that guarantee clearfelling in rapidly diminishing areas of unburned forest highly likely to lock-in its extinction. Moreover, areas of known suitable habitat are again being targeted for logging through the watering down of survey standards to be used by ecologically inexperienced field staff of the Victorian government.



Lindenmayer writes: *I took this in the mid-1990s when I was working with American conservation scientist Robert Lacy on computer modelling of the risk of extinction of the species.*

If the species is to have any hope of persistence, major reforms must be implemented urgently. First, scientific analysis clearly indicates that the current reserve system is inadequate, especially if another wildfire was to occur in the next 50 years. An expanded national park is essential to protect remaining habitat and connect other areas of presently fragmented forest, and it must be significantly larger than the average size of wildfires.

Second, the amount of forest being logged and the damaging way the forest is cut has massive negative effects on the species. Far more stringent prescriptions must be implemented (and then properly policed) to better protect Leadbeater's possum in forest landscapes that are broadly designated for logging. These prescriptions include prohibiting logging from at least half of each forest block to allow it to grow through to an old growth stage; protecting all big old trees (nest sites) with a 100-metre buffer of uncut forest; widening streamside reserves to protect areas of potentially suitable habitat, and immediately banning clearfelling.

Since the early 1990s, scientists have argued that logging in Victorian forests cannot be regarded as ecologically sustainable if it results in the loss of biodiversity. The conservation of Leadbeater's possum is therefore a major test case of governments' ability to manage forests. Scientists and conservationists agree that the time is overdue for state and federal governments to 'grow a spine' and ensure that another iconic Australian animal does not go extinct.

Professor David Lindenmayer
Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU

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Sealed fate

Plummeting penguin numbers spark one of many messy conversations about conservation for *Quentin Chester*



We have seals at the end of our street, dozens of them. Well, when I say street, I mean on the coast, seven kilometres down a rocky track. They're New Zealand fur seals, though they're not blow-ins, that's just their name. Truth is, they've always been here.

If you wander long enough around Kangaroo Island you keep bumping into these seals. When not lazing in the sun on the capes and headlands they're screaming through the water chasing fish, squid and octopus. For a long time they were a novelty; an animal spotted on far-flung outposts. Lately, however, they've even been bobbing up around town jetties and marinas.

You'd think this might be a cause for celebration. After all, with those big, dreamy eyes, whiskers and puppy-dog faces, the seals are about as cute as anything in the ocean. But no, these guys are cast as villains. 'They eat our tuna' and 'they nick lobsters from our pots' say the locals. Worse still, the rise in seal population coincides with a localised decline in the numbers of another animal, one that's a visitor favourite and money-spinner for tour operators. We're talking here about the poor, helpless and excessively adorable little penguin. So no longer are the seals just petty thieves. Now we're being told they're munching on the cast of *Happy Feet*.

It didn't take long for the lynch mob to gather, there were letters to the paper and public meetings that demanded action. In front bars, supermarket aisles and out the back of fishing sheds the mutterings were the same. 'We're losing business', some said, while others talked mournfully about the impending closure of the Kangaroo Island

Penguin Centre. 'Something must be done', they all said. And when the authorities didn't rush in and start culling seals – well, that was just typical.

As with many discussions about the mysteries of nature, conservation and mending what's left of our little planet, science and facts don't count as much as what people want to believe. I'm not the greatest conservationist. I don't march in protest or travel to forests to lie down in front of D9 bulldozers. Nor do I generally buttonhole strangers to talk about rising CO₂ levels. It's not a lack of sympathy for the cause; it's the business of confronting

That said, to love the scruffy charms of the bush is to know the threats to its survival. At some point most of us who get off on the wilds try to find a path that respects these places. No surprise either that this regard shapes how we treat the rest of what counts as our world. These pathways can be personal

partitioned against the doomed squalor of town. It was people like me who worshipped the wilds versus the shady, faceless forces destroying Mother Earth.

But this line of thinking only works if you keep nature quarantined from anything resembling actual life. The debate runs on rails when conservation is about preserving distant parks and wilderness areas. It's the impassioned voice of reason against the nutters who want to dam wild rivers or chip their way through stands of ancient forest. The issues get blurred when the spotlight turns back on us.

How can we be 'for nature', while at the same time having our snouts deep in the trough of urban life, with all the consumer-driven privileges that entails? And things get even stickier when you move out to the country. Especially those edge-lands where decisions about how to look after wild terrain are tethered to the need to farm, cope

If wild communing delivers any kind of message, it's that the world is more intricate and baffling than we care to imagine.

and not especially glamorous. Good on those who fight the good fight – the bods who protest and advocate – but perhaps it's also okay to plant a few trees, stay out of strife and live out your days in a low-impact way.

The idea that anyone who goes bush has to be an eco-warrior has always been far-fetched. It's the old 'if you're not angry, then you're not paying attention' line. This puts too tight a squeeze on the experience. After all, the joys and glimpses of nature as we wander the woods, clomp up hills and float our way down canyons appear with no strings attached.

If wild communing delivers any kind of message, it's that the world is more intricate and baffling than we care to imagine. That goes for people too; we're a seriously mixed bunch. When it comes to agreement and getting things done – be it bracing the earth for climate change or deciding how best to care for a few penguins – this diversity can be infuriating.

As a young city boy, the conservation equation looked easy. I could flit from suburbia to the flinty ravines of the Flinders Ranges, with the purity of nature neatly

with 'development' and keep a community ticking over. Think the forest districts of Victoria's East Gippsland or the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, or almost all of Tasmania for that matter.

It's in these areas that conservation questions go from abstract and impersonal to contentious and gritty. Almost anything to do with plants and animals, securing boundaries or sharing water and land involves people you know, and most likely a motley collection of blowhards, saints, rednecks, backstabbing politicians, hippies, do-gooders and eggheads.

Which brings us back to K.I. and its fur seals. We know that the seal population is up and penguin numbers are down. But, as with most things to do with marine ecology, what's driving these changes – and what we could do to help – is harder to pinpoint.

When Europeans first landed on the island in the early 1800s almost every beach was covered in either seals or sea lions. During the next 50 years or so, around 100,000 animals were taken from the island. Interestingly, little penguins don't rate much of a mention in the earliest accounts from

the area. So perhaps – just perhaps – their presence is a relatively recent artefact of the changes wrought by sealing and the long-term absence of predators. In any case, by the time tourism got going here 30 years ago, strong penguin colonies had become established near the two main towns of Penneshaw and Kingscote.

What happened next is more a matter of conjecture than hard data. While the colonies have declined to just a handful of birds, ravenous fur seals may not be the only culprits. As the towns have grown, so the penguin colonies have been subjected to more disturbance from people, boats and ferries, plus predation by cats and dogs. On top of that, the birds have had to put up with nightly visits by tour groups – often more than 100-strong – stomping around their nest sites with cameras, kids and torches. The fur seals' appetite for penguins might also be driven by the fact that we humans have depleted preferred food sources like fish and squid. With what little we do understand about the ocean, there could be dozens of interlocking factors affecting the fate of the penguins, their food sources and their ability to raise chicks.

None of this background gave pause to those who agitated for New Zealand fur seals to be culled. The details of such an exercise – like how many animals should be killed, as well as where and when it should happen, and how anyone would know when to stop the cull – weren't been made clear. Instead, the debate has often been portrayed through the prisms of suspicion, ignorance, rumour and prejudice. Such is the nature of the beast that is a small, isolated community. The old islanders have survived by a stubborn belonging to place and a self-belief that they can do it all, including create dominion over nature. But that was then.

For centuries now, the world has been transforming before our eyes. As the tempo gathers pace it's easy to shift our conservation concerns into complaint or despair, but not everyone goes with the blame game dead-end. Out on the margins all manner of people are doing their little bit. The result is messy and piecemeal, but communities are changing. It's a battleground for hearts and minds that simply didn't exist when Europeans first landed here. And one small measure of that change is that a bunch of hard-nut islanders are passionate about the fate of a small flightless bird. W

A Wild contributor for over 30 years, **Quentin Chester** has penned six books about wilderness areas. quentinchester.com



Fur seals are one of few mammals in Australia to be increasing in numbers.
Photo: SATC / Milton Wordley

A nationwide decline in little penguin numbers has been attributed to natural predators such as seals and sea eagles as well as feral cats, foxes, disease and declining fish stocks.
Photo: Tourism Victoria





Fern follower

Melbourne-based botanist Daniel Ohlsen shares his insight into the secret life of ferns with *Rob Ditessa*

Studying the DNA sequences of ferns often requires botanist Daniel Ohlsen to make long and arduous treks in rugged and sometimes uncharted terrain. His aim is to chart biogeography, or how different ferns have come to be where they are and how they are related to each other, in the same way other scientists have done with trees.

He hopes the data he collects will not only help us understand more about the medicines or foods that ferns might provide, but also focus conservation efforts in the right places. The Royal Society of Victoria recognised this ambition last year when it awarded him the Young Scientist Research Prize.

Accompanying Ohlsen on a scientific trek would take you on walks through some spectacular country, including locations that are closed to the public such as Arnhem

Land or the Windsor Tableland. You would see some of the rarest and most amazing flora of Australia. "I've been on treks and long day walks all over Australia, and in the future I'd like to trek into areas that are botanically poorly explored such as some of the peaks around Cairns, Cape York and New Guinea," he says.

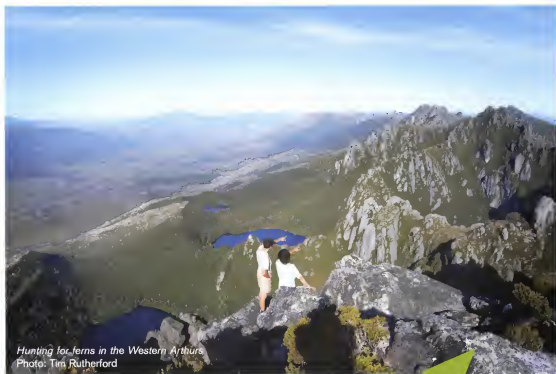
Work has taken him into untracked areas of Queensland's Daintree forest and Atherton Tablelands, but Ohlsen's home state of Victoria continues to excite him. He recalls: "I did a trek into Bryce's Gorge in the Victorian Alps where there are no tracks leading down into the canyon so you have to find spurs and gullies to get into and out of the bottom where my ferns are, avoiding the vertical cliff lines.

"In the bottom of the gorge, halfway between Conglomerate Falls and Pieman's Falls confluence on Conglomerate Creek,

there's a 20-metre, single-drop waterfall at the head of a long chasm that is quite spectacular."

Maintaining a focused mind, Ohlsen walks fast on his treks to give himself the maximum amount of time to locate the plants, which are sometimes not where he expects. The real art to collecting rare plants, he explains, is knowing when to give up. If a plant has disappeared naturally from a site, he is wasting time that could be spent searching elsewhere. Only once he has found his specimen does Ohlsen walk more leisurely and take in the scenery fully.

Fern DNA degrades rapidly, so in order to sequence it, Ohlsen must use freshly collected plants. Planning a trek is complicated by the fact that the details in Csiro's national herbarium, where plant specimens are stored, are often vague and lacking GPS coordinates. To find one fern,



Hunting for ferns in the Western Arthurs
Photo: Tim Rutherford

"It took me three attempts on three separate days to find the plants because the rainforests in Far North Queensland are so dense and it's hard to get an accurate GPS reading."



NAVIGATING BY THE PLANTS

Ohlsen says plants are a natural track marker because they sometimes grow in only one section of the walk. When walking for fun on the northern circuit of Wilson's Promontory, he used a distant line of eucalyptus to find his way to the Lower Barry Creek Campground. He explains: "The surrounding vegetation was dominated by either banksia woodland or grassy tree heathland, and I hadn't seen any eucalyptus north of Five Mile Road, so I knew that they were likely to be occupying a different environment. I also knew that eucalyptus regularly grow along waterlines in drier areas, so I deduced they would be on the creek where the camping area was." He advises fellow bushwalkers to keep note of where certain types of plants grow so they can better read the landscape; "In the high country, for instance, certain species of eucalyptus occur at different altitudes because of temperature tolerances; if you know what species you are walking in, you can get a rough idea of your altitude."

Daniel in Bryce's Gorge
Photo: Adele Neale

Asplenium normale, which is known from only two tiny populations in northern Queensland, Ohlsen had to track down the botanist who made the discovery, and even then it was no easy task. He explains: "Even after his description of how to get to the site it still took me three attempts on three separate days to find the plants because the rainforests in Far North Queensland are so dense and it's hard to get an accurate GPS reading."

One of Ohlsen's most memorable trips was to Tasmania's Lake Sydney and then into the Western Arthurs. The main aim of these back-to-back walks was to collect a rare coral fern, *Gleichenia obscura*, which is found only in a few mountain ranges in the Southwest National Park and involved following a non-existent track through hip-high mud.

Earlier this year, he completed the full Western Arthurs traverse from Scotts Peak Dam with his partner, collecting *Gleichenia obscura* and *Hymenophyllum applanatum* en route.

He says: "The fact the ferns were abundant in the middle of the range was significant because these species often only

occur in small populations elsewhere."

Ohlsen also discovered a new, very large population of *Gleichenia rupestris*, while hiking the wilderness coast track in Victoria's Croajingolong National Park and braved dangerously heavy rains to find some rare filmy ferns in the *Hymenophyllum* genus in southern New South Wales' Monolith Valley. A rope for crossing rivers or pack hauling is now a vital part of his kit.

In addition to recreational bushwalking gear, Ohlsen carries plastic bags to collect specimens, ziplock bags with silica gel to dry the plant material, and a notebook to record location, size, adjacent vegetation, habitat and to press plants if necessary.

Next year, he'll join a botanical expedition to climb Queensland's second highest mountain, Bellenden Ker.

"This will be a botanical expedition in untracked rainforest country," he enthuses. "My main objective will be to look for several species of ferns that have only been collected once in Australia in 1909 by Czech-born botanist Karel Domin but I'll also be looking for other rare and new fern species." W



KILLER INSTINCT

Following a stranding of killer whales in southern Queensland, *Steve Van Dyck* ponders our enduring fascination with the wolves of the sea

Ever since mid-July when five of us from the museum drove up to Fraser Island to flense out the skeleton of a stranded and rotting six-metre killer whale, I've been wondering about the universal appeal of this species. Why do people love *Orcinus orca* so much (there are actually fan clubs for 'orcaholics')?

My conclusion is that we love killer whales because they look like panda bears. Or, less tangentially, they display the same general visual patterns that elicit the same 'ooh-ahh' response. Innately, humans respond protectively to creatures with high foreheads, round heads and big eyes because these are features of human babies. It's not a matter of choice, we simply can't help it. For a long time we've known that birds don't feed their chicks because they love them, they simply cannot resist showing worms into gaping beaks and yellow cavernous throats. Humans respond in the same preprogrammed way, at one

end of the spectrum with a warm protective feeling; at the other end, standing on diving boards to drop dead fish into an orca's jaws.

If you think the panda connection is preposterous I can suggest a quick exercise that will demonstrate the point. Take a picture of a killer whale and paint all the white bits black, leaving the big white 'eyes' until last. Suddenly it doesn't look so cuddly. Go a step further and colour it all a deep, shark-grey. Suddenly sitting on the beach and minding the bags seems preferable to swimming. If you'd chosen a picture of a killer whale with its mouth open and its dinosaurian teeth exposed, then what you have just created in grey-shade is a monster, whose diet contains as little restraint as it does bamboo shoots.

One 6.4-metre killer whale from the Bering Sea was found to have remains of 32 fully grown seals inside its stomach. Another had crammed 13 porpoises and

14 seals in, with a 15th halfway down its throat waiting for the congestion further down to clear.

Killer whales, found in all oceans of the world and irregularly seen off our own coastline are, undeniably, the most awesome warm-blooded butchers of the sea. Bull killer whales are distinguished from the smaller cows by their erect, two-metre dorsal fins (once thought to be used as knives for dismembering victims prior to eating). As whales go they're not enormous, growing to nine metres in the adult male, but they have strength and social organisation sufficient to cut down creatures three times their size in the form of the blue whale – the biggest animal ever to appear on Earth's surface.

Hunting in family units or pods of between five and 20 members, such a pack in surging pursuit of prey must rank as one of the most compelling yet dreadful sights on the ocean.



Found worldwide, the killer whale has long fascinated humans and is a totem for numerous Aboriginal groups. In Norway, a cave drawing of the animal has been dated at 9,000 years old.



Orcas swimming past McKenzie's Jetty, Fraser Island, on July 5. Photo: NPRSR

It has been said that panic-stricken grey whales will retreat into the refuge of Californian bays where breaking waves offer them protection from hunting killer whale packs. Nevertheless, some pursued whales have been seen to abandon hope of escape and, turning onto their backs, wait to be ripped apart by the killers.

In 1981, Lyle Watson wrote: 'In the Antarctic we watched two killer whales tilt an ice floe by lifting it on their backs so that a sleeping Weddell seal slid down directly into the waiting jaws of a third whale'.

The undisputed top predator in the marine ecosystem, this whale hounds and attacks just about anything worth eating, from huge baleen whales through about 20 other species of cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins, narwhals, belugas), 14 species of seal, 23 species of fish, and sea otters. Not to mention moose, deer, turtles, squid, birds (lots of penguins), dugongs, sea lions and even polar bears and walrus, while female belugas (white whales) are killed but never eaten.

But, notwithstanding their ferocity and the odd fatal attack on oceanarium humans, killer whales exclude humans from their essentially warm-blooded diet (maybe we subconsciously love them all the more for sparing us). The reasons for this are inexplicable but stories of cooperation between humans and these whales are some of the most fascinating accounts ever written.

The most notable comes from Twofold Bay in south-eastern New South Wales where, in the late 1800s, a unique relationship was struck between a family of killer whales headed by patriarch 'Old Tom' and a group of humpback whale hunters headed by George Davidson.

Early in winter, the pod of killer whales would appear in Twofold Bay ready to take advantage of the imminent migration of



National park staff caring for orcas beached on a sandbar. Photo: Michael Ford



Steve's team collects valuable specimens from one of three orcas to die after becoming stranded in the Great Sandy Strait. Photo: Veronica Cekanova

humpback whales up the coast.

The pack would hound and bully any humpback that came into the bay and prevent its escape while one or two swam to the village and alerted the whalers with breaching and 'flop-tailing'.

The chase would be on with the whaleboat quickly harpooning the humpback with the help of the orcas. Two orcas would then peel off and swim under the humpback's head to prevent it from diving too deeply; two would repeatedly

throw themselves across the humpback's blowhole to prevent it breathing, and the remainder of the pack would hinder its forward progress.

At this time, Old Tom was given to grabbing the harpoon line in his teeth and apparently enjoyed being dragged along by the fleeing humpback for 20 to 30 minutes at a time.

Eventually the tiring humpback would be lanced and mortally wounded, whereupon the killer whales would manipulate its jaws until the mouth could be opened and all could feast on the succulent tongue and lips.

The relationship survived until 1930 when Old Tom died. His skeleton was carefully preserved and is on display at the Eden Whaling Museum.

With its prestigious biodiversity, the Great Barrier Reef might seem a guaranteed place to see killer whales, but they are almost never reported. Astonishingly, the orca skeleton we retrieved represents the only specimen of this whale ever to be registered into the collections of the Queensland Museum. And although, just south of the reef, there has been one documented observation of them killing and consuming a humpback calf, the 20th-century near-decimation of both humpback and dugong populations in the east may have impacted on the culture of specialisation in killer whales. With humpbacks now recovered to pre-whaling numbers, however, and the eastern population producing around 1,700 pre-heated, tender, takeaways every winter...it's only a matter of time. For humpbacks, that prospect must almost make harpoons look humane.

Dr Steve Van Dyck is senior curator of vertebrates at the Queensland Museum

WINTER WONDERLAND

The Yukon, Canada's smallest and most westerly territory,
brings out the frontier spirit in *Elsbeth Callender*



When I first picture myself in Kluane National Park and Reserve I'm stomping across one of the world's largest nonpolar icefields, which surrounds Canada's highest mountain like a giant tutu, while debating the metaphysical truth of glaciers en Français with my dashing Québécois guide. After bunkering down in a log cabin we wait for the stroke of midnight to view the dancing flames of the northern lights. Unfortunately, I'm prone to making gross misjudgements about places I've never been to.

I'd got my first look at the icefields on Google Images – a deceiving source wherein each picture tells a thousand words without the thousand others you need for context – and had invented the cabins, my bilingualism and the clockwork constancy of aurora borealis. Then, when my Yukon contacts assured

me before departure, that I was being overly ambitious about icefield accessibility in winter and delusional about cabins in Kluane National Park (of which there are none) I overcorrected and built false limitations. It wasn't until the first of a string of day trips into Kluane with a Dutchman my father's age and overnight motel accommodation that I realised it didn't have to be this way. I could have tried to camp.

Before my exposure to life at the 60th parallel north, my only experience of Canada had been soggy Christmas visits to my sister's in Vancouver; even when there's no obvious precipitation, the cold there holds its damp fingers against your lower back like a malicious lover. Even considering camping in those conditions gave me chilblains, so the dryness of the Yukon is totally unexpected – I never knew cold could be like this.

Yukon winters are so cold and dry that snow falls as miniature ice-blocks that can be brushed off like breadcrumbs. Vehicles often need to be plugged in overnight like giant mobile phones so they'll start in the morning, but anti-freeze and windscreen wash are unnecessary because there's either a hardened crust of ice across the glass that must be scraped off or a sprinkling of fresh snow that blows away as soon as you begin to roll. The only decent hoarfrost I see anywhere in the territory is on the trees and giant neon lightboxes around the steamy pools of Takhini Hot Springs on the outskirts of Whitehorse, the territory capital.

I soon realise the dryness of this subarctic climate means that getting warm and staying warm – unless the temperature is desperately low and the wind excitably high – is achievable if you



Kluane National Park
Photo: Government of Yukon

DID YOU KNOW?

The Yukon is home to more than 160,000 caribou, 70,000 moose, 22,000 mountain sheep, 6,000 grizzly bears and 220 species of birds, plus 34,000 humans.



Traditional clothing of the Southern Tutchone people at Kluge Museum. Photo: Government of Yukon
Modern snowshoes can be rented from Up North Adventures in downtown Whitehorse. Owner Mark Stenzig is also a good source of advice on local conditions.

have the right clothing and understand how to wear it. It's all about trapping dry air, warming it up and keeping dry, no sweat.

It is -16°C and windless on the morning of my first day snowshoeing in the national park that occupies the southwestern corner of the Yukon. Having landed in Whitehorse on a -25°C day, this temperature feels oddly manageable. My guide, Joost van der Putten, has decided we should start with Slim's River West trail that, in its entirety, is a popular two to three-day summer hike on which you're almost guaranteed to see a grizzly. In mid-January, the very dead of winter, these beasts generally stay in their dens but it's still up for debate whether they technically hibernate or just lightly nap with one ear pricked. On the drive northwest from our base at Haines Junction, I banish this thought and allow the magnificent scenery to distract me.

The road from Tachã Dhãl visitor centre to Slim's River West trailhead summer carpark is closed over winter so we park just off the highway and walk from there. Having worn snowshoes once or twice before it doesn't take me long to get reaccustomed; just a minor widening of my gait and I completely forget I'm wearing them (between occasional trip-ups).

Tachã Dhãl, meaning 'sheep mountain', is the language of the Southern Tutchone. The name Klwane (kloo-WAH-nee) was created by early settlers and apparently combines the Southern Tutchone name for Klwane Lake, which means 'big fish lake', with the name used by their coastal trading partners, the Tlingits, which means 'whitefish country'. The national park lies within the traditional territories of the Klwane, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, all of whom are Southern Tutchone.

Precise language has always been crucial to the Southern Tutchone, who were originally a nomadic people. In this land of extremes, knowing when and where particular resources can be found, conceiving of the landscape prior to travel and learning from past events is imperative for survival. Today, the implementation of their land claims means First Nations people are able to once again hunt, fish and trap within their traditional territory, having previously been denied these rights since 1943 when the Klwane Game Sanctuary was established.

The snowy road Joost and I tread towards the summer carpark is marked with fresh tracks. Moose are identifiable because they sink a long way down, then drag their



With bears out of the picture, the main animals we need to be aware of sharing space with are moose, wolf and coyote.

strong legs through the snow as they do in water. Small birds hop along on top leaving pretty patterned prints, as do arctic ground squirrels. Snowshoe hares – the inspiration for our elongated footwear – leave tracks across the snow that recall the shape of male genitals, if you ask me. Wolverines also have large furry snowshoe-ish paws, but we don't see any sign of them.

Generally speaking, domesticated animals meander and wild are purposeful. Yet with only about five hours of daylight at this time of year, our own tracks are uncharacteristically unswerving for creatures who've paid a deposit to pass the night on springs.

With bears out of the picture, the main animals we need to be aware of sharing space with are moose, wolf and coyote. Of these, moose are considered the most dangerous (arguably of all the animals in North America) because they're unpredictable. They're also very big. Alaska moose (a name nobody in the Yukon uses) are the largest subspecies of moose and largest deer on earth. Males can be over two metres at the shoulder, have a two-metre antler span and weigh more than 630 kilograms. There are around twice as many moose as there are people in the Yukon. Moose tend to attack when there's



any type of threat in sight but will cease the attack when the threat is no longer visible. It seems you can just stand behind a tree.

On the gradual incline of the old mining road on the other side of the summer carpark, I warm up enough to remove my mittens and huge coyote-trim parka. From this main trail of Slim's River West, we pass tracks branching off towards Sheep Creek and then Bullion Plateau. Although the parks authority prefer that hikers use the established trails, there also seems to be an approach in the Yukon that if animals roam it then people can too; as long as it's done with respect.

We test the limits of our snowshoes climbing an icy hillside that overlooks the frozen expanse of Slim's River. Despite being the snow season, grass and dirt are exposed on the northern slopes of the hills, and I spot Dall sheep grazing over yonder. Unless it's overactive skin memory, the sun's rays feel warm on my face. For a place where it can get below -50°C, this weather is sensational.

While I'm gazing across the river, Joost says something I don't quite catch and I turn to see where he's pointing. There's a trail disappearing around behind the sheep-dotted hillside. The light from the low-slung sun is making everything



The writer on Auril trail

shimmer and shine. "Beyond Bullion Creek," he repeats, "you can camp anywhere". He points down the river: "And that way takes you to the summit of Observation Mountain where you can overlook Kaskawulsh Glacier, though you need to be careful of avalanches at this time of year". But I'm not listening anymore. I'm imagining walking around behind that hill and setting up a tent.

As a child I deeply resented the way those few-hundred-metre loop trails from a carpark to some natural attraction and back again made me feel so undeserving at the amazing lookout or waterfall or cave and then unsatisfied and empty as I climbed back into the family wagon. As an adult, I work hard for my views, summits and swims. Similarly, exploring the wilderness by day and returning to a motel room is like brushing your teeth between each

course of a degustation menu.

But it's too late to change our plans. Back in Haines Junction that night, I can't work out how to turn the heater down in my room or open the window; I wake at intervals with my heart racing and my throat dry. Each time this happens I open the door wide to let the icy night blow in while I sip water and gaze at the mountains that appear to be just across the road and so striking in their white enormity that they could be fake. I also check for the northern lights while I'm at it, but they're having a shy couple of weeks.

The following day we walk Auril trail, which is a 15-kilometre lasso-shaped track. It's close to Haines Junction so popular with locals and, for at least part of the trail, the snow is already packed by other people's shoes, skis or snowmobiles. Although the snowmobile could be

considered the jet ski of the frozen world, it leaves in its wake a beautifully flat track that is the perfect width for snowshoes. This tranquillity-trashing monster is, unlikely as it seems, the snowshoer's friend.

The Yukon is the size of South Australia with a population of 35,000, so 'popular with the locals' means we see one other person all day: a love refugee from elsewhere in Canada who now lives in Haines Junction with a partner who works for the parks authority.

"I'm a gardener," he says with a sigh, his eyes flicking around in gesture at the snowy ground and the day's low cloud. Just at that moment the mist shifts to reveal a string of white peaks against clear blue backdrop. "Could be worse I suppose," he says, blushing, and skis off with three huskies bounding around him.



The huge mountains that circle us like tiered seating in an amphitheatre are part of the St Elias Range. These visible 'foothills' reach a height of about two kilometres above sea level. Mt Logan rises another four kilometres higher (at 5959 metres) and is surrounded by icefields nearly a kilometre thick in some places, from which more than 2,000 glaciers flow. Although Logan is only the second highest peak in North America, it's believed to have the largest base circumference of any non-volcanic mountain in the world. To reach the icefields, mountaineers are dropped on a glacier – usually Quintino Sella – by helicopter or ski plane during a six to eight-week season in May and June. Even in summer, winds up there can hit 130 kilometres per hour with a wind chill factor of -75°C . "You stick your finger

out of the tent," says Joost, "it falls off."

At the two-kilometre mark of Aurioi trail, the track divides into a loop and we head left because everyone else has too. We're on a real track today: narrow and undulating, winding through what appears to be sapling forest.

"If you think they look a bit shabby, that's because these spruce are about 60–70 years old," Joost tells me, splintering my sapling theory. He then picks up a small branch covered in coppery leaves that shimmer and shake even though his hand is steady as a rock. It's trembling aspen. Aspen is often mistaken for birch in North America, but the moose don't care – they'll happily nibble on either.

Then it begins to snow and the change in weather provokes discussion on how to construct an emergency shelter. This leads on to the topic of cold camping, which is bush camping with a four-season tent and a super duper warm sleeping bag as we know it; quite conceivably manageable at -16°C but bordering on suicidal at -40°C . Then Joost enlightens me to something that sounds far more suited to this type of climate: wall tent camping. It's the practical solution to properly experiencing a place like Kluane that preoccupies me for the rest of the trip.

Halfway around Aurioi the track that had been prepared runs out and we're forced to start forging our own path. The going is significantly slower – perhaps a quarter of the speed – through knee-deep snow with an uneven surface beneath. We'd been making our own track on Slim's River West too, but that was on a road and the snow wasn't half as deep. We haven't got enough daylight to finish the loop at this speed and soon turn around to retrace our steps.

Back at Haines Junction I lower myself into the tiny motel bath with a steaming cup of drip filter coffee. I picture myself returning to Kluane National Park to tread one of the trails that penetrates the park at its eastern boundary, pulling my gear behind me on a toboggan. Each subarctic winter's night of my multi-day adventure, I'll be toasty warm in a canvas wall tent with a wood stove. I will pass the many hours of darkness passionately debating in English, with whichever Yukon local I manage to coerce into taking me camping, on subjects such as the metaphysical truth of glaciers. **W**

Slim's River West

Trailhead: Tachāl Dhāl visitor centre, 7km north of Haines Junction on Alaska Hwy

Distance: 45km return (not including side trip to Observation Mountain)

Map: 1:50,000 Slim's River 115 B/15

Aurioi

Trailhead: 7km south of Haines Junction on Haines Hwy

Distance: 15km loop

Map: 1:50,000 Aurioi 115 A/12



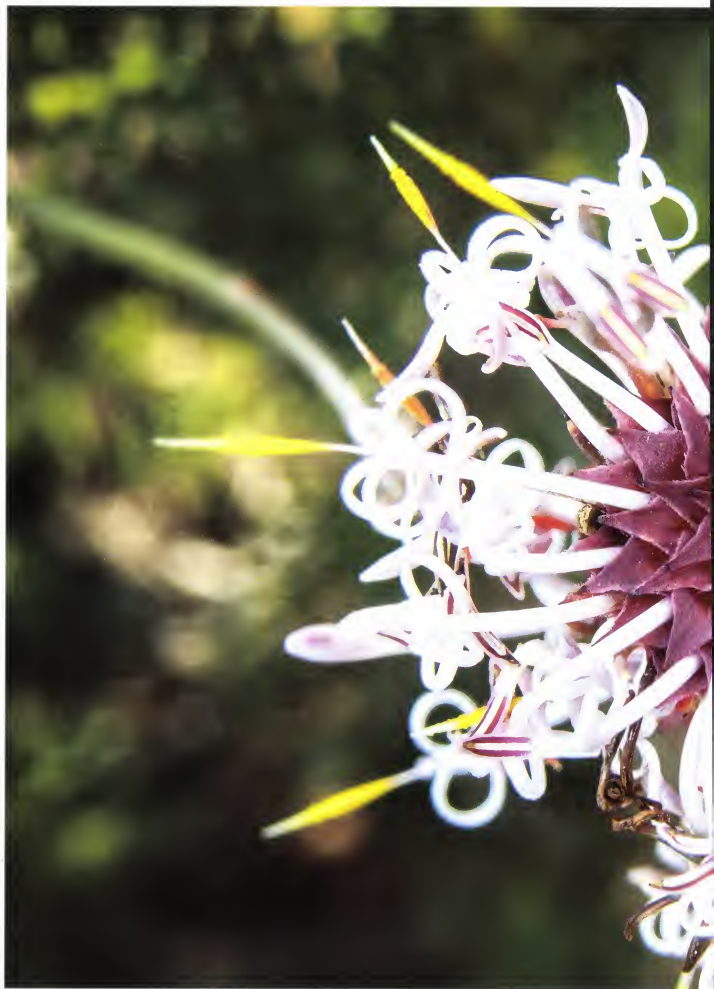
LOCAL VIEWPOINT

Chris Wilkinson from the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon

"Kluane National Park is one of the most beautiful areas I've ever been in; the mountains are stunning, there is abundant wildlife, and yet it is relatively accessible. Besides snowshoeing, I recommend visitors check out the cross-country ski trails at Mt McIntyre, or take a multi-day dog sledding tour. If you visit in February you can watch the longest dog-sled race in the world, the Yukon Quest.

Australians took over from the Brits last year as the second biggest group of visitors to the Yukon and my winter tip for them is layers, layers, layers! There are companies in Whitehorse that rent out warm boots, parkas and pants, so you don't need to fill your suitcase with outerwear. While there are definitely opportunities to camp in winter, you have to be pretty dedicated.

WTAY has a code of conduct that outlines how wilderness guides should act, which includes directions for leave-no-trace camping, respecting culture and heritage, and staying safe near wildlife. Wildlife is one of the big draws to the Yukon, but it can be elusive due to the size of the territory. My most memorable encounter is seeing wild muskoxen on Herschel Island, off the north coast. Yukon only has around 200 muskoxen and seeing these ice-age beasts in their natural habitat is not something I'll soon forget."





Petal POSES

As Western Australia's world-famous
wildflowers come into bloom in the
south, self-confessed florimaniac
Claudette Pope opens her archives





Previous page: Pincushion coneflower (*Isopogon Dubuis*) in Glen Forrest. Clockwise from left: Red kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos rufus*) in Kings Park; Yellow tailflower (*Anthocercis littorea*) in Nambung National Park; Rose-tipped mulla mulla (*Ptilotus manglesii*) in John Forrest National Park; Endangered black magic grevillea (*Grevillea calliantha*) cultivated in Kings Park

Perth-based Claudette Pope traded a career in IT for macro photography after taking a workshop at Kings Park and becoming fascinated with the colours and symmetry hidden within wildflowers. She has carried her camera equipment across the US, Canada and New Zealand, but is most happy when photographing the endemic flowers of Western Australia. Wildbeauty.com.au

RIVER

A person in a blue kayak is seen from behind, paddling down a calm river. The river is flanked by steep, densely forested hills. The water is dark and reflects the surrounding greenery. The word 'RIVER' is overlaid in large, white, serif capital letters across the upper right portion of the image.

Dan Kozaris on the Gordon River. Photos: Ro Privett



LESS *travelled*

The passion of previous explorers ripples through time to *Ro Privett* as he paddles Tasmania's wild Denison River

The careers of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis, two of Tasmania's conservation heroes, have long inspired me. In his 1975 book, *Travels of Olegas Truchanas*, Tasmanian painter Max Angus asks: 'What would the odds be of two men from the Baltic states finishing up in Tasmania, being top wilderness photographers, each dying out there, each devoted one to the other?' Their photos have been referred to as windows into the 'unknown quarter' or Transylvania of Tasmania, inspiring many an adventure in the island's wild west. Hoping to follow in their footsteps, I spent a year planning a journey through this uninhabited region – one of the last temperate wildernesses on earth – before taking to my trusty kayak.

Looking across Lake Gordon from the sleepy hollow of Strathgordon my travel companion Dan Kozaris and I are nervously excited about the week ahead. The plan is to venture up Pearce Basin, then drag our kayaks over the King William range to access the Denison, a wild and remote river that Truchanas first explored in the late 1960s. A couple of days floating down this watery postcard would lead us into the renowned Gordon River and Sir John Falls, before arriving at Heritage Landing

near the opening to Lake Macquarie. We had packed supplies for six days, including a small bottle of port for special occasions.

As long ago as 1916, the potential of these rivers for hydroelectric power had been noted. In October 1963, *The Mercury* reported that the Commonwealth Government would 'bear the cost of constructing an access road from southern Tasmania towards the remote and hitherto largely inaccessible southwest for development of the vast hydroelectric resources'.

In the years to follow the rising waters of the Gordon Dam swallowed some of the area's hidden treasures, including the sublime Lake Pedder. Truchanas and Dombrovskis played a pivotal role in the Franklin River campaign of the newly formed Wilderness Society by providing the visual ammunition. Truchanas became famous for hosting wilderness slideshows in Hobart to raise public awareness of the region's mountainous grandeur, while his protégé Dombrovskis captured the iconic image of Rock Island Bend that sold the green message better than any speech.

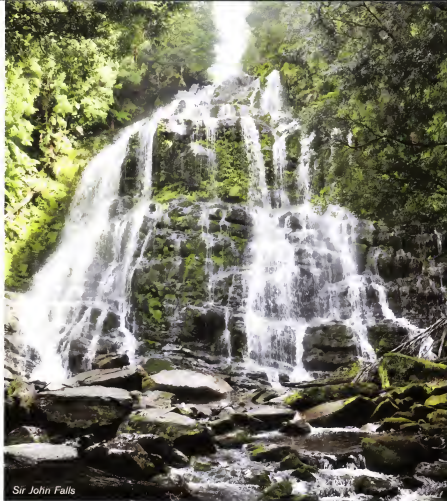
With this tumult echoing in my memory, we reach the north-west corner of Pearce Basin and bunker down for the night on a tiny island.

After a lazy first day, I'm not long into day two before sweat is pouring down my face. The 50 metres up to the first knoll, carrying gear on my back and an empty boat, is tortuous, and there are 300-odd more metres to go. Scrambling up the side of a steep range through thick, near-horizontal scrub, often on all fours, while dragging a plastic anchor, is no mean feat.

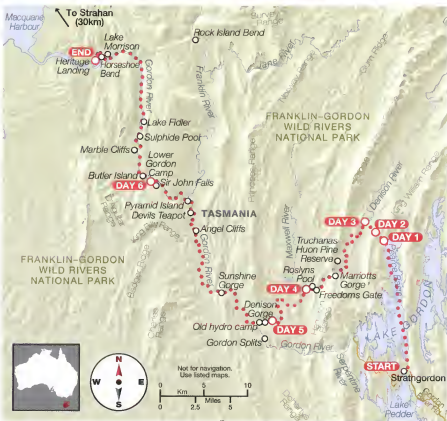
Thankfully, the track through the maze of melaleuca scrub is easily discerned, in most places. As a view of Lake Gordon opens up behind us, we come to the highpoint of 541 metres. It has been several hours of toil, including yanking our kayaks over numerous logs, but we've made it to a perfect campsite for a late afternoon rest.

The following day, the trail develops into a razor-like ridge. Steep drops either side have me gripping my kayak for dear life, terrified it will 'ghost boat' down the slope to freedom. At least the rocky outcrops keep the vegetation at bay and serve up tantalising views to the west, the Denison River tantalisingly close.

Eventually, the Denison flows before us in all its glory, hidden from the clutches of the manmade world. After such anticipation, this moment is now frozen in my mind forever.



Sir John Falls



MAPS

Coverage of the area is provided by the Tasmap 1:100,000 Olga, Wedge and 1:25,000 Lancelot, Olegas, Serpentine maps. Be aware that low water would mean more portaging over logs, while flood conditions could cause problems in Marriotti's Gorge. tasmap.gov.au

This river has spent millennia forcing its way through the Precambrian quartzite that covers about half of the region, moulding the rock into the craggy waves and folds we see today.

Though my kayak must be as eager as I am to touch the river, it's late and a stony beach is calling us to safe harbour for the night. Here, tucked away in a remote valley, I discover the true meaning of escapism. Port wine has never tasted sweeter, and a quote of Dombrowski's springs to mind: 'There is a certain wildness, a certain wild element in man's nature that is essential to the humanness of man. If man becomes contained, too docile, programmed, then he becomes less human.' Just as the effort of reaching this place has exhausted me, it is also rejuvenating my soul.

Remembering the notes of the first canoeing party to tackle the Denison, we approach the river's deep and narrow gorges (which didn't appear on maps until the 1960s), with no small amount of trepidation. I half expect to see Truchanas floating in front of me in his self-designed kayak, and wonder if we have made the right decision bringing 'plastic fantastic' kayaks that don't have the same advantage as his aluminium-frame boat of being easy to dismantle.

After paddling a few kilometres we reach the northern boundary of the Truchanas Huon Pine Reserve, which was established in 1971 as a result of the photographer's campaigning and since absorbed into the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. The highlight of our trip, these uniquely Tasmanian conifers were first described by the Sticht party in 1928 and later identified as the oldest living trees in Australia, placing them among the oldest living organisms on Earth. One set of fossil records from a tree found here dated back 3,462 years.

With Marriotti's Gorge fast approaching, I have to paddle defensively as the river pierces the Hamilton Range. We bounce through boulder rapids, occasionally scouting and portaging around chutes choked with ugly logs or boulder sieves, in between rocks that seem to pop up everywhere like a mob of meerkats on the savannah.

The timing of our arrival at the next mini gorge, Freedoms Gate, is impeccable, with the westerly sun cutting through the cliffs like a secret gateway to heaven. I'm relieved at the placid approach to the gorge and drift wearily into the comforting clutches of Roslyn's Pool. I imagine Dombrowski's glancing back upstream from this same spot and realise I have it easy with my compact digital camera. He mostly used a large, heavy Linhof Flatbed Field camera and carried no more than two large sheets of film, so it was



Denison, the first big drop to Lake Gordon.

one shot and one shot only. He would wait all day for the perfect moment. Looking at Dombrovskis' work you feel like you are tip-toeing through the untouched valley with him, so it's strange to experience it for real. I think he captured the sacred atmosphere of this place perfectly when he noted: 'We moved in a glittering sun-splashed world where living assumed a clarity and intensity unknown in ordinary city-bound existence'. I even find myself looking out for the Tasmanian thylacine, famously extinct since 1936.

We float past the Maxwell River confluence and spy the tantalising lead-in rapids of Denison Gorge. The gorge is a smorgasbord of grade-three rapids, some of which require portage as the lines are either

choked with fallen timber or simply unrunnable. We paddle carefully, realising that the section of the river that could suck us underground lay just ahead. Dropping through countless boulder garden rapids, I understand what Dombrovskis meant when he wrote: 'Our bodies became attuned to rock and rapid, our senses eagerly absorbed the roar of white water and the silent greens of the rain forest'.

When we reach the spot where the Denison heads underground, we disembark and haul our kayaks up an indistinct trail that's signposted by an old pair of thermals hanging from a tree. After the intense concentration of riding the rapids, the idea of someone sacrificing their underwear to the river makes us both fall about laughing

The next two hours, however, turn out to be the toughest of the trip. The first vertical step requires a three-to-one mechanical pulley system and our boats get repeatedly wedged between tree roots. More than exhausted, and beset by drizzle, we happily retire for a night in the gorge.

The next day offers up a selection of grade two and three rapids with nifty chutes and drops. When the whitewater eases off, we paddle beneath the high cable of the old Hydro camp. It's a sobering reminder of what might have been had the dams on the lower Gordon not been stopped. Somewhere around here is a 300-year-old aboriginal site and the spot where stone tools were discovered that proved prehistoric occupation of the region.

Wilderness on Water

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Passing Angel Cliffs on the Gordon River.

Ahead of us is the confluence with the mighty Gordon River, and it's with both gratitude and awe that we bid farewell to the river that has treated us so well. Truchanas must have been a man of great courage as the first ever to navigate these turbulent waters via the Serpentine River in 1958.

Three kilometres upstream of the junction are the famous Gordon Splits. This is where the powerful water of the Gordon has worn a deep slot through quartzite to create a geological phenomenon. The craggy masses of the splits form a hundred-metre gorge with a narrow passage of water flowing in

between; Truchanas and Dombrovskis' photos of this are spellbinding. Unfortunately, we don't have enough strength to paddle and scramble upstream to see the splits for ourselves this trip, but what better reason to return?

Up next is Sunshine Gorge, near where the proposed dam and power station would have committed its crime to wilderness and flooded parts of the Denison, Maxwell and Gordon valleys. When Pyramid Island comes into view we know we have reached the Franklin. A fair few miles upstream is Rock Island Bend, the photograph of which galvanised 6,000 protestors and helped the High Court overrule the state government's hydroelectric plans in 1983. It is then with something greater than relief that Dan and I beach ourselves on the sandy shores of the Lower Gordon camp.

After a beautiful sunrise, we make for Sir John Falls. This oft-photographed spot boasts a magnificent waterfall of about 34 metres. Then floating past the unmistakable Butler Island, where so many protestors stood, we come to the almost-mythical Lake Fidler. Fidler, like nearby Lake Morrison, is one of the shallowest meromictic lakes in the world, meaning the salt and freshwater layers do not intermix.

Before we know it, we're rounding the final bend and pulling up for celebratory beers at Heritage Landing. As much as my



Negotiating the rapids

aching limbs beg me to return home, the grandeur of this part of the world is holding me back. This wilderness has given me time to myself, to reconnect with a good friend, to rediscover the joy of simple things. It's as if the world has stood still for a moment – that silent, floating moment – and I see why the older I get the more I want to explore wilder places rather than greater rapids.

'We moved in a glittering sun-splashed world where living assumed a clarity and intensity unknown in ordinary city-bound existence.'

Tragically yet aptly, both Truchanas and Dombrovskis died alone in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area to which they devoted their careers. It was on the Gordon River, above the Denison confluence, where the former drowned on January 6, 1972. Then in 1996, Dombrovskis suffered a heart attack while photographing in the Western Arthurs. His parting gift was a snapshot of Mt Hayes, which contributed to his being the first Australian inducted into the International

Photography Hall of Fame. The timeless work of these two men reminds us that people who are not concerned about the environment aren't so because they do not care but simply because they do not know. They certainly opened my eyes to new environments and experiences.

Dombrovskis said it all when he explained: "I go out there to get in touch with the land, to get in touch with myself.

When you get out there, you don't get away from it all. You get back to it all. You come home to what's important; you come home to yourself."

Before I can get too caught up in self-analysis, however, the Lady Jane Franklin II cruise boat – our ticket home – rounds the opposite corner. **W**

Albury-based Ro Privett works in outdoor education, dabbling in whitewater whenever he can.

MORE PADDLING ADVENTURES

Roaring 40s Kayaking offers sea kayaking tours of the Bathurst Harbour and Port Davey waterways in south-west Tasmania ranging from three to seven days (paddling between campsites). A seven-day tour taking in the Breaksea Islands in December, including internal flights and park fees costs from \$2950 per person. **Roaring40skayaking.com.au**

A 10-day expedition rafting the full navigable length of the Franklin River, including a day walk to Frenchman's Cap, is available through Water by Nature from \$2890 per person in January. Tours are led by two guides, internal flights included and groups limited to 10 people across two rafts. **Franklinriver.com**

Franklin River Rafting offers eight and 10-day beginner tours for \$2595 per person in October including equipment, optional hike to Frenchman's Cap, meals, park fees and coach transfers from Hobart. **Franklinriverrafting.com**

A six-day walk, cycle and kayak tour of the east coast is one of Tasmanian Expeditions' most popular. **Tasmanianexpeditions.com.au**

Tassie Bound offers a half-day kayaking tour on the Derwent River. **Tassiebound.com.au**

Sea kayaks can be hired on the Freycinet Peninsula for \$55 per day. **Freycinetaventures.com.au**

For more info on minimal impact kayaking in and around Tasmania visit **parks.tas.gov.au**

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Land of light and

silence

Walking the world-famous Larapinta Trail backwards can have a strange effect on you, writes *Christina Armstrong*

Ellery Creek Big Hole
Photos: Craig Fardell



A flier southerly keeps us walking through the dark without rest, following trail markers that glow in the light of our head torches. Wanting to catch sunrise from the top of Mt Sonder, we set off from Redbank Gorge camp at 3.30am. Near the summit the wind gusts strongly enough to unbalance me atop the cracked and white, rust-edged rocks. Then warm sunlight spills over the distant horizon, turning the mountains every colour from hazy yellow to deep red. The Chewings and Heavitree Ranges stretch out to the east, dusted in blue shadows. Among that jumble of peaks and gorges, I try to imagine where the Larapinta Trail might lead us through to our end point in Alice Springs, a whopping 223 kilometres away.

Heading east from Redbank Gorge the next day, we travel through witchetty bush and ironbark woodlands on the way to our first food drop at Ormiston Gorge. The day is filled with birdsong; flocks of zebra finches crowding in the wattle trees and the odd ringneck parrot in the grass.

We camp on the westernmost hilltop lookout to take in the views to Pacoota Range in the south, Ormiston Pound to the east and the bare rocky cliff face of Mt Sonder, now behind us in the west. A grey-headed honeyeater returns again and again to our hunted shade tree to feed on sweet sap



from a low slit in the trunk. Then the wind drops and evening light turns the sky pastel pink and blue. There is an overwhelming silence: the intense quietude when everything stops moving and your own breath buzzes in your ears.

In stark contrast, the next day at Ormiston Gorge is all noise and activity. There's a crowd for the park ranger's slideshow, tour buses and queues for the kiosk. We meet Cliff, a solo trekker walking east to west, who has something of the trail's light and silence in his glazed eyes.

"I think I'm setting a world record for the slowest time to do the Larapinta trail," he says. "I've got 25 days, I'm taking it all in, hadn't seen anyone for five days until this lot." His 65-year-old face, behind its thick grey beard, has the wild in it.

Keen to get going the next day, we pack in the dark and leave Ormiston Gorge before sunrise. Even in winter, a surprising and increasing heat has been building and the cold wind of Mt Sonder has vanished. We want to avoid climbing to the 1,088-metre heights of the Heavitree Range in the heat of the afternoon, plus we're craving the silence of the high ridges once again.

We decide to set up camp on another lookout; wherever there's a high point on the trail someone has already scratched out a small pad to sleep on. The views into Ormiston Pound and across the valley to jagged Mt Giles are uninterrupted. Between the multicoloured rocks around us sprout ankle-high grasses and surprising bunches of purple daisies. I instantly name this our best campsite of the trip but, after just a few days on the trail, we've already exhausted our list of favourite things. We've seen so much: flowering pink hakea and indigo bush, fluffy mulla mullas, peregrine falcons, whistling kites and spectacular western bowerbirds, corkwood trees laden with bunches of yellow flower and dingoes patrolling the

Left: The view from Counts Point.
 Inset: The famous nipple-mark rocks of the West Macs
 Below: Painted firetail



riverbeds. Each day seems to reveal 'the best', 'most spectacular' or 'prettiest' of things.

After the 'best campsite' it's time to tackle the steep, rocky descent into the small and intimate surrounds of Waterfall Gorge. Tucked between parallel ranges, it feels like one of those hidden corners that only Larapinta walkers get to. From here we follow long moonscape valleys before turning into Inarlanga Pass, clambering over boulders and discovering our first MacDonnell Ranges cycads. These huge and ancient plants are relics of wetter times and can be found on the northern sides of valleys and hidden in the cool of deep gorges.

The next part of the track from Serpentine Chalet Dam turns out to be my favourite section, as it leads us through dense, mature forest and mountain gullies with well-constructed stone steps up and down the ridge. We discover the incredible view from Counts Point on the way and reach Serpentine Gorge, the 'most peaceful' gorge yet. So many highlights and it's only been a week; two more to go. Ellery Creek Big Hole is a bit like the halfway point of the Larapinta Trail. Many walkers finish or start at this point for a rewarding, shortened trail experience. We're enjoying ourselves so much we decide to add in an extra day's walking and take Cliff's advice to break two of the upcoming long, remote

legs of the trail (sections four and five of 12) into two days each. Fortunately, the food drop room at Ellery Creek contains a box of excess items including some dried pasta meals, copious toilet rolls and the biggest bag of ground pepper I've ever seen. We make up an extra day's rations and walk out of Ellery Creek, full of promise and food, to face the most physically challenging and remote sections of the trail: through Hugh Gorge, over Razorback Ridge and up the difficult heights of Brinkley Bluff.

Ellery Creek also marks our last day among the Heavitree Range. The Alice Plain spreads out before us as we mount the final saddle, the Chewings Range looming 30 kilometres across the other side.

During two days of crossing the Alice Plains we're treated to our 'most memorable' sight of the trip while camped at Rocky Gully. A wheeling flock of 200 green budgerigars twists like a school of swarming fish, changing from one black mass to a neon green ball of light. For more than half an hour they circle the hills, alighting briefly on dead trees, before suddenly taking flight and repeating the whole magnificent show.

While the abundant wildlife of the Alice Plain is a surprise, the next four days' walking lives up to its reputation – spectacular, remote, physically demanding.

At Hugh Gorge we rock-hop our way up

the narrow chasm to Hugh Gorge Junction and drop our packs for a short side trip deeper up the gorge. The rock walls on either side tower more than 200 metres above us in a huge red amphitheatre. A pool of dark water finally blocks our way, where the gorge walls press only a couple of metres apart. It's an awe-inspiring place, the massive red cliffs glowing with reflected light and the shady gorge echoing birdsong.

This rugged central section also demonstrates the rocky heart of the Larapinta Trail; we've passed through Rocky Bar Gap, Rocky Gully, over Rocky Saddle, past Rocky Talus and towards the Rocky Cleft by day 12. Rocks are a constant hazard underfoot and their variety of colour and form seems endless, from sharp quartzite to black dolerite knife-edges and others rippled with the unmistakable patterns of an ancient inland sea.

After days of rocky terrain it's bliss to soak my feet in the icy, black pool at Birthday Waterhole, though a full-body dip has me retreating to the warm beach after a few seconds. Next we have to lug kilos of water up the steepest, hardest climb to Brinkley Bluff.

We reach the first saddle by 9am after a fairly straightforward walk and then drop into the shady gully of Rocky Cleft, which is an oasis of cycads, lomandra, native pine and



mallee. Here the trail takes a direct route to the summit, straight up and over sharp quartzite ledges without any shade or cover, but it's mercifully short.

The view from Brinkley Bluff down the Chewings Range is a dynamic jumble of bare peaks and deep gorges. North of the range, the hard afternoon light does strange things to the desert, making plains look like oceans. One sandy depression in the distance looks like a misty winter valley.

Having arrived before lunch, we enjoy a long afternoon relaxing on Brinkley's Bluff watching painted firetails build their nests in the spinifex. I realise that as we've become accustomed to the silence of the landscape, we're talking less and less, but taking in more and more.

That evening, we're treated to a long-burn sunset followed by an equally orange full moon rising over the distant twinkling lights of Alice Springs, visible for the first time.

MAPS

The Larapinta Trail Information Package gives topographical maps and track notes for each section (written east to west), including information on flora, fauna, geology and historical locations. \$44; Parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/parks/walks/larapinta

PROVISIONS

For two people, with three food drops, hire of storage containers, \$50 key deposit,

It's a beautiful sight but also a reminder that the end of the Larapinta Trail is near.

Standley Chasm acts as a kind of primer when, after so many days of clear light and wild silence, we are once again thrust into the loud and busy world of tour buses and perfumed holidaymakers. We've not seen another soul for four days so at this point, much like Cliff, human life is almost as fascinating as the wildlife.

We only have one more day of rugged mountain walking before the scenery changes to hills of rolling mulga and witchetty bush. There's still beauty to be had though.

Fish Hole near Jay Creek camp is by far the most beautiful and unspoiled waterhole of the trail, with plenty of fish, red dragonflies and finches. An important location for the Arrernte people, it can only be approached from the northern end and camping is prohibited.

The forests here have bigger trees than

we've seen on earlier parts of the trail, more bloodwood and ghost gums. The Arrernte call the bloodwood 'arremike' (are-kern-kah) and collect the grey galls that it grows for their coconut-like interior and the large juicy grub inside, which is eaten raw.

We reach Euro Ridge before I have time to digest what we've achieved and race to catch our final sunrise on the trail. Even on the last day the wild doesn't leave us. Two huge wedgetail eagles lift off the ridgeline ahead and glide to their nest in the crown of a tree.

As we walk through the last hills towards Alice Springs we run into a young solo walker just setting out. I give him a slightly evangelical summary of the trail, and he looks at us warily.

I realise that after 19 days on the Larapinta Trail, without washing and barely speaking, we must present a rather disquieting image. A little like Cliff, the light and silence etched deeply into every dirt-encrusted pore. **W**

pick-up from accommodation and drop off at Redbank Gorge, quotes ranged from \$485 to \$540. There are food-storage rooms at Ormiston Gorge, Serpentine Gorge and Ellery Creek Big Hole. Camping fees apply at some sites but there is no trail fee.

GUIDED TREKS

Advanced ecotourism operator Willis's Walkabouts offers on- and off-trail experiences on the Larapinta each June

from \$1,295 per person.

Bushwalking holidays.com.au

World Expeditions upgraded its two semi-permanent camps for walkers on three and six-day treks this year. A 14-day supported trek starts at \$3,490.

Worldexpeditions.com

Trek Larapinta offers a 16-day end-to-end trek with food, camping gear and transfers from \$4,495. **TrekLarapinta.com.au**

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

RED, GREEN OR IN BETWEEN: BUSHWALKS TO REMEMBER



While the Larapinta is one of the world's great bushwalking trails, there is far more to the Centre than a single trail. Our trips take you off the tracks to wonderful places you might never find if you went on your own. You certainly wouldn't see them with another tour operator.

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WILLIS'S WALKABOUTS



RECALL OF THE WILD



*James gets the best of the land in the
Unbanned saga. Photos: Roger Stuart*

Lapsed bushwalker *James Stuart* discovers what he's made of during an overnight adventure in Kosciuszko National Park

It's late morning on a mid-autumn day when my father and I finally pull up at Guthega Power Station car park. Without even setting foot on the trail up into Kosciuszko National Park, we're already a couple of hours behind schedule. After a lengthy stop in Jindabyne to stock up on forgotten provisions and last-minute tips, we've lost the benefit of a pre-dawn departure from Canberra. Then again, this is my first overnight walk in over 25 years so I'm not about to rush into anything.

I'm not sure why it's been so long since my last expedition, given my happy mishmash of childhood memories from such trips. I still recall my excitement, aged seven, on a family hike to Rendezvous Creek in Brindabella National Park. The narrative of that particular trip is just a series of vignettes in my mind: the rush of catching plump trout in pristine creeks, the crackle of the camp fire...but striding through tall grass and eucalypt forests to an unknown destination obviously imprinted on my psyche.

Now in my 30s, with a family of my own, the time has come to seek out that feeling again. It's not that I had forsaken the wild; I'd filled the years with day walks and car camping weekends in Australia and overseas. But the camaraderie of student holidays and a couple of disastrous camping trips, cut short by vicious thunder storms and cheap tents, had somewhat diluted my interest in backcountry adventures.

What I do know is that it's more than a desire to reconnect with my childhood that's driving me into the wild again, though my reminiscences prove how complexly landscape can be inscribed in your memory. My father, who at age 69 is as youthful in body and mind as he's always been, is the natural companion to help me answer this question.

After flirting with the idea of a one-night trek over three days in our old stomping ground of Brindabella National Park, we had decided on the Round Mountain Hut Circuit in the Jangungal Wilderness. But then the local ranger alerted us to the landslides caused by record summer rainfall. Finally, we settled on a variation of the Schlink Hut Walk that heads north from Guthega Power Station at the confluence of the Munyang and Snowy rivers. The plan is to follow the trail up to the hut, before striking off trail for Mawson's Hut, north of the Kerries Ridge. It's an ambitious goal given our lack of recent experience, but we want to learn by testing

On Dicky Cooper Bogong



our limits and have fallback options in the form of nearby huts and trails.

It's almost midday when we take our first steps up Disappointment Spur Trail. We make steady progress through a forest of snow gum skeletons that creak and groan mysteriously in the crisp autumn breeze. Multi-hued clouds ripple across an electric blue sky. We fill our bottles with the sweetest water imaginable from the rivelets that cross over and under the trail on their way to the Munyang River, and soon settle into a good rhythm. Our only companions are the grasshoppers and small brown birds, as well as large beetles that display their brightly coloured abdomens by way of warning whenever we get too close.

An hour and a half in, we reach Disappointment Spur Hut. Like so many in the region, the hut is a relic of the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme that's now used by hikers and maintained by volunteers of the Kosciuszko Huts Association. A crude wooden bench here makes for a perfect picnic table.

At this stage, the hike still feels like a day

walk, albeit with much heavier packs and a lot more preparation. The trail curves and cambers up the mountainside until we catch glimpses of an expansive duotone vista defined by the whitecaps of dead snow gums and grey granite outcrops, and the olive green of new trees and understorey that rise up from either side of the valley. This palette expands as we reach more open terrain and eventually White's River Hut, which is surrounded by pale yellow grass and marks the halfway point of our ascent.

With sub-alpine forest thinning out, we find ourselves walking in full sunlight more often than not, even encountering a white-lipped snake soaking up the afternoon heat. It feels like our emergence from the forest is both physical and psychological; the more distance we put between ourselves and the car park, the more layered our experience of the landscape becomes. Thinking back to a visit to the central desert and passing through gaps in the monolithic granite blocks of Kata Tjuta, I realise I'm experiencing that same sensation of being absorbed by the landscape. As we step into the valley beyond Schlink Pass, on level ground for the first time since setting off, I'm happy to be embraced by the snow gum copses and alpine heath.

Just as I'm starting to feel the strain of the early morning start and my poorly arranged pack, we come upon Schlink Hut. After a brief rest, we agree to stick to our original plan and head into the Kerries. Making it to Mawson's Hut seems unlikely, but surely finding a campsite in the valley will be easy enough.

Rereading the guidebook, we approximate the correct route to be an ascent to a saddle about 100 metres above us. We follow a more-or-less direct line but the heath is far thicker than anticipated. It's underlain by boggy ground and the incline is the steepest so far. Focusing on executing each and every step perfectly, I reach the saddle in about 20 minutes and then watch Dad edge his way up, stopping every so often to catch his breath.

The descent into the next valley is kinder as the heath eases off. Again following the guidebook, we take a direct route and ford the creek at the first opportunity, with the intent of making a more gradual, northward ascent along the west face of the Kerries. Unfortunately, the dark-green heath that covers most of the mountain face and had seemed so innocuous from the saddle,



A perfect moment at a less-than-perfect campsite

JUMPING OFF FROM JINDABYNE

Located at the start of what is fondly known as the Roof of Australia, Jindabyne is the ideal jumping off point for many an adventurous activity:

Auswalk offers self-guided and group inn-to-inn walking tours of the Snowy Mountains in the spring. auswalk.com.au

Jindabyne-based guide Bruce Easton takes snowshoeing and backcountry skiing tours of the Snowies. Wildernesssports.com.au

The Snowy Mountains Climbing School runs various climbing, abseiling and snowcraft courses. Snowymtns.com

Guided wildflower, astronomy and photography walking tours are available through Thredbo-based K7 Adventures. K7adventures.com

The annual Snowy Mountains Muster will bring a high country art and bush poetry to Jindabyne the last weekend of December. Snowymountains.com.au



James at Disappointment Spur Hut

proves to be dense and knee-high; like moving against a viscous, leafy tide.

After another 20 minutes Dad crosses back over to the west side of the creek, where the ground is slightly flatter and the heath somewhat thinner. We keep a parallel route until I glance over and see him sinking into shrubs just about thick enough to hold his weight in a sitting position.

It's been over an hour since we left the trail and we've come less than two kilometres, so I accept that Mawson's Hut is out of reach. From halfway up the slope, I survey both sides of valley, noting little other than large swathes of the dark green heath I'm currently in. Viable camping spots are non-existent, except for a grassy clearing near the creek below.

Trudging back, I recross the creek to find Dad well and truly spent. We slowly make our way to the camp spot which is a bit bumpy, on a slight incline and too close to the creek, but does feature a thick cover of soft grass just large enough to fit a tent. My heart sinks when I realise the ground is saturated, with the water table barely a knuckle-length below the plant base. We pitch the tent regardless and stretch out on the flat boulder set to become our camp kitchen.

Sipping on a very welcome cup of tea by the full and rapid creek, a sense of absolute calm comes over me. We have reached our intended destination though any goal-oriented ideas faded away long ago. Old memories begin to coalesce into the present

and the few kilometres that separate us from human infrastructure to the west might as well be a light year. Exhausted in body and mind, I feel like I'm sinking into the rock on which I sit, that I've reached the end point I had been seeking.

Then a clear, soft light breaks on to the ranges creating a chiaroscuro effect across the stark landscape. When Dad's inner photographer wins out over his tired legs we dash to the top of the ridge and watch one of the most spectacular sunsets either of us has ever seen. Golden half-light catches distant crags and highlights the abstract sculptures of snow gums. Awestruck, we stay right up until the sun dips behind a distant peak in a final burst of red and orange.

With twilight comes a plummet in temperature and rain showers. We eat quickly, taking slightly more time over our plastic bottle of vintage shiraz, and turn in for a restless night. The cocktail of red wine, over-exhaustion, cold, and fear we might sink into the water table in our old and neglected tent, keeps sleep well at bay.

But when we emerge into the stillness of morning, the north-south axis of the valley divided into equal halves of shadow and light, our tent is on the right side and I feel perfectly reenergised. After spreading our wet gear out to dry and wolfing down a hot breakfast, we make for the northern side of our sunset ridge.

From here it's easy to see that reading the map and not the landscape had brought

us to the most inhospitable slope on the range. It's even colour coded: dark green for heinous height; light green for passable heath; orange and green for boggy; and light yellow for grassy joy.

With a new route mapped out, we determine to attempt at Mawson's Hut another day. The immediate aim is to ascend Dicky Cooper Bogong Mountain in the afternoon, so we head back towards Schlink Hut. The gentler incline and grassy terrain this way makes for a nice change after the previous day's demoralising efforts through the horizontal heath.

After setting up camp behind the hut, we set off through the flat, boggy grounds to the west and cross over a creek. Freshly acquired off-track experience sees us to weaving uphill with relative efficiency, crossing two ridges in quick succession before reaching the base of Dicky Cooper Bogong's peak. Leaving the summit attempt to me, Dad opts for a comfortable vantage point from which to take in the seemingly endless spread of forested mountains.

Eventually I emerge from the maze of granite boulders that define the summit, humbled by the expanse below in which Dad is but a tiny figure. With less than an hour's daylight, we then zigzag our way down the eastern side of the mount,

towards Schlink Pass. Like everywhere else in the ranges at this time of year, it's alive with running water.

The relative warmth of Schlink Hut's interior saves us from having to light a fire while we cook, and I imagine huts like these have saved more than a few hikers and skiers caught in bad weather. Tonight, the skies are clear and all that rains down on us are the pin-prick lights of a billion stars.

The next day we're surprised to find the tent fly encased in frost. Though the temperature dipped below zero overnight, we'd slept far more comfortably than the first night.

While packing for the return leg, four hikers power into view around a bend (the first we've seen in two days). Earlier risers than us, they're already several kilometres from their camp lower down the valley and about to strike ache, off-trail to Tin Hut.

The return journey starts with a straightforward descent, past Schlink Pass and back on to Disappointment Spur Trail, but my feet and shoulders now ache constantly. As we labour downhill, conversation turns back to the practicalities of everyday life: conflict at work, paying off the mortgage, my brother's life in Paris.

Although we don't discuss why Dad joined me so readily on this hike, I sense the opportunity to reconnect with me and my childhood was as important for him as it was for me. I wonder whether walking through a certain landscape can be a kind of rebirth. I'd never told Dad how much of an impression our overnight hike in the Brindabellas had left on me, but by attempting to reenact it in some form I can let him know without saying a word.

Despite retracing our steps, the views south up the Snowy River valley towards the main ranges, and the transformative effect of the journey, give the place an unexpected aura of newness.

I'm exhausted but wholly content when we're jolted out of the wilderness by the industrial area of the power station.

As we stretch our sore muscles in the car park, every unknown corner of this landscape and all the others I've ever read about sprawl out in my mind, a maze of potential futures. I have the distinct feeling we've only just reached the trailhead of our next walk. **W**

Sydney-based **James Stuart** is a communications manager by day, published poet by night, and reinvigorated overnight bushwalker on weekends.

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BEST PLACES TO RAISE *adventurous kids*

Using almost no scientific data, *Wild* brings you Australia's top towns for getting children hooked on adventure

APOLLO BAY, VIC

Forget the crisp ocean air and seal colonies, the draw of Apollo Bay is its easy access to the lush tall forest, picturesque waterfalls and twinkling glowworms of the Otway Ranges. Young families can start with short outings to Currawong Falls or the 300-metre-high Tree Top Walk before working up to an eight-day adventure on the 104-kilometre Great Ocean Walk, where campsites abound. Platypus hunting on Lake Elizabeth is another popular activity and Princess Margaret Rose Cave is less than an hour's drive away.

BRIGHT, VIC

The residents of Bright in north-east Victoria have adventure on their doorstep all year round, from beginner bushwalks like the Monolith Track in Mt Buffalo National Park to overnight hikes along the Alpine National Park's Razorback, and from sunrise snowshoeing tours of Mt Hotham to 65 kilometres worth of cross country skiing trails across the Bogong High Plains. Kids can also learn to paddle on the Ovens River that dissects the town and a further 140 kilometres of mountain biking trail is set to be added to the existing Rail Trail. Sally Brown at Tourism North East says: "The fact we have four distinct seasons highlights the fact that there is so much to do outside in Bright, whether it's walking in the fields of yellow wildflowers to getting into the snow-covered backcountry." And while a three-bed house here tends to be around \$400k, they start at \$280k.

ARMIDALE, NSW

Named as one of New South Wales' seven Evocities because it combines attractive employment and education opportunities with natural beauty, Armidale is an ideal base for bushwalkers, birders, paddlers and canyoneers within an hour of the world heritage-listed New England and Oxley Wild Rivers national parks. Tourism official and mother Katrina George says: "My children love the natural swimming hole at Gara Gorge just 16 kilometres from the CBD and they call the Weeping Rock or Cascades walks 'Harry Potter world' because they find it magical." With family houses starting at \$250k and spectacular sites such as Ebor Falls in Guy Fawkes National Park and rock-hopping routes through Cathedral Rock National Park relatively nearby, Armidale is high on our list of family-friendly base camps.

ALBURY/WODONGA, NSW

On the banks of the mighty Murray River, Albury is designed around active families with easy access to Lake Hume, Mt Lawson State Park and Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park in addition to more than 100 kilometres of walking and cycling trails. AlburyCity tourism officer Sue Harper says: "Local teachers regularly take the kids down to Wonga Wetlands to learn about the birdlife and 600-year-old red gums and there are plans to extend the walking track from there to Lake Hume." Nail Can Hill is a popular spot for wildflower walks and the city sits at the end of the 400-kilometre Hume and Hovell Walking Track. The discovery of the chocolate lily is bound to get children interested in plant life and the local bushwalking club runs activities ranging from after-work canoeing to beginner cross-country ski trips in the Victorian snowfields an hour and a half away.

Photos: Destin von NSW

SUNSHINE COAST, QLD

Sunshine Coast is not just about surfing and sailing but also hiking the forested hinterland, kayaking the Noosa Everglades and rare plant-spotting in the Glasshouse Mountains (pictured). In fact, the Sunshine and Fraser Coast tourism authorities even teamed up earlier this year to promote the area globally as Australia's Nature Coast. Gerry Price, acting principal at Matthew Flinders Anglican College, says: "We're in one of Australia's tourism capitals but on the other side of our cricket oval is rainforest; you can jump in a canoe and be in pristine wilderness in half an hour." Sunshine Coast kids can also catch the explorer bug in Great Sandy National Park, birdwatch in Anamoor State Forest, relax beside Kondahilla Falls or take in the views from the top of Mt Coolumb.

WARWICK, QLD

The safest place to buy a house in Queensland according to the RACQ Insurance Home Security Index, the historic town of Warwick is also a good jump-off point for Girraween and Main Range national parks. Sally Buckingham from Southern Queensland County Tourism says the former is a good place to watch for blue wrens, yellow-tufted honeyeaters and bearded dragons, and recommends the creek-based walks in the Goomburra section of Main Range National Park, which is part of the Gondwana Rainforests world-heritage area.

ALICE SPRINGS, NT

Before they're ready to tackle the world-famous Larapinta Trail, children can learn about the Northern Territory's wildlife and landscapes in Alice Springs Desert Park within the town boundary. Lord mayor Damien Ryan says: "You can be camping in the bush within five minutes so kids develop a solid understanding of climate and the environment early on." Local schools like St Philip's College take advantage of proximity to the MacDonnell Ranges with multi-day camps among the ochre-red gorges, pristine waterholes and ancient rock art. There aren't many better places to grow up for learning about Aboriginal culture and bushcraft, plus Uluru is a mere four hours away.

CHECKLIST

- National parks nearby
- Established walking trails
- Close to iconic scenery
- Range of outdoor activities on doorstep
- Big enough to have good schools & job opportunities

DUNSBOROUGH, WA

Dunborough and the wider Busselton area is said to be the events capital of regional WA, but it's also situated on the 135-kilometre Cape to Cape Track and only 10 minutes' drive from Ngilgi Cave. With a more moderate climate than Perth, Dunborough is part of an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot. Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park, which is the state's most popular park, treats walkers to around 150 species of orchid as well as the world's westernmost karri forest and Devil's Lair cave.

KUNUNURRA, WA

Camping is the leisure activity of choice in Kununurra in the east Kimberley, with sites all along the Gibb River Road 4WD track. Glen Chidlow, chief executive of Australia's North West tourism board, says: "The Mirima National Park, which is like a mini Bungle Bungles, is walkable from Kununurra and waterfalls abound in the wet season between January and March." Birders can look out for the rare Gouldian finch and great bowerbirds on Lake Argyle, while amateur geologists marvel at the 600-million-year-old zebra rock found near the Ord River. The world heritage-listed Bungle Bungles, which were only 'discovered' by those outside Aboriginal and cattle droving circles in 1982, is a scenic flight or 250-kilometre drive away.

Photo: Tourism WA

PORT VINCENT, SA

A little over an hour from Innes National Park and known as one of Australia's tidiest towns, Port Vincent on the Yorke Peninsula is an ideal place to raise environmental aware children. The local primary school is equipped with a marine study centre, and there are clifftop tracks for seal-spotting. In addition to short hikes along the rugged coastline and through the mallee woodlands of the national park, the Port Victoria Geology Trail is about 45 minutes away.

Farmhouse on the Curramulka to Port Vincent road. Photo: Tourism SA

TANUNDA, SA

The Barossa Valley may be best known for its shiraz, but Tanunda is also on Australia's longest dedicated walking trail. Winding through the dense pine trees of Mt Crawford Forest and the stringybark-clad ridges of Kaiser Stuhl Conservation Park, the 1,200-kilometre Heysen Trail can lead Tanunda residents down to Cape Jervis or all the way up to Parachilna Gorge in the Flinders Ranges. Families can also take in the Mt Lofty Ranges out on the multi-use Kidman Trail, or practise their photography among the flame heath of Hale Conservation Park. Murray River National Park is less than two hours' drive away.

HOBART, TAS

Whether Hobart, Launceston or Strahan best deserves the title of adventure capital is up for debate, but Tasmania's pint-sized metropolis has better access to rainforested valleys, towering cliffs and white beaches than many of the other towns on this list combined. With day trip options including Hartz Mountains National Park, Bruny Island and the dolerite caves of Hastings, Hobart is a clear frontrunner for outdoorsy families.



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Drying times

Dehydrating your own food is a smart way to spice up your outdoor menu, writes *Andrew Davison*

Drying food for preservation is an age-old tradition and probably one of the most efficient methods. By extracting the moisture that would normally feed food spoilers like bacteria, not only will your supplies last for weeks but they'll also weigh as little as a quarter of what they did originally. Cooked and then dried rice, lentils or other hard grains work well as they take no time to rehydrate in the field (so you save on carrying fuel and cooking time), but dehydrating allows you to broaden the variety of foods you take on a walk far beyond this. It's important to use fresh, healthy produce. Fruits and vegetables are best dried as soon as possible to retain flavour, and you should dip ones that turn brown when exposed to air in lemon first.

For people who live in a suitable environment, sun drying is the most cost effective and efficient way to dry fresh produce. It is simply a matter of laying the prepared ingredients on a rack that allows sufficient air circulation, leaving it in the sun throughout the day, then bringing it inside late afternoon to shelter from evening dew.

Using the oven allows you quality control; you simply place your produce on a wire rack at 60°C and leave the door slightly ajar to let moisture escape, checking its progress every few hours and rotating racks if necessary.

But the least-fuss method is using a commercial food dehydrator, which allows you to dry entire pre-cooked meals as opposed to just individual

ingredients. The controlled nature of a dehydrator means you can literally dry food in your sleep and experiment with a range of recipes.

With every method, drying times vary depending on what it is you are drying, how thinly you have sliced it and the humidity of your environment. Once dried, you should leave your food to cool before packaging it in an air-tight jar or plastic bag, then store in a dry, cool, dark place.

Here are two recipes for which I used different drying methods to suit the ingredients. For saffron and orange flavoured meat I dried the ingredients separately, then cooked them together in the field. For lentils with zucchini, I dried the combination in a commercial dehydrator.





SAFFRON & ORANGE FLAVOURED DRIED MEAT *(pictured left)*

Serves 2

I discovered this recipe in a small village in central Iran. The Qashqai woman who made it for me used fresh meat, but I think it works equally well with dried meat. It's a simple meal, but delicious.

Rind of 2 oranges (dried)
1 small onion
1 desert spoon of oil
150 grams of cubed or minced meat (preferably beef)
½ teaspoon of pepper
¼ teaspoon of turmeric
¼ teaspoon of saffron
Juice of one lemon
Salt to taste

AT HOME

To prepare the orange peel, wash the oranges and then carefully remove the rind, leaving the bitter white layer behind. Cut the rind into fine strips and place in a pot of cold water, then bring to the boil and allow to bubble for four to five minutes. Remove, rinse and then repeat the boiling process for a further two minutes. Rinse and lay the rind on a wire rack covered with a tea towel and leave on the window sill in the sun for a few days until dry and crisp. I recommend using a commercial food dehydrator for any meat as machines come with specific instructions.

IN THE FIELD

Finely chop the onion while heating oil in a pot, then fry. Add a quarter cup of water and all other ingredients except the saffron. Simmer until the meat is ready to eat (this rarely exceeds 10 minutes), then stir through the saffron and allow to dissolve. Serve over rice.

LENTILS WITH ZUCCHINI *(kuboreh)*

Serves 2

For variation, replace zucchini with other fleshy vegetables such as mushrooms or squash (dried or fresh). This is an easy one to cook and dry at home in its entirety, but this method works with oven-dried zucchini slices and home-dried tomato paste or shop-bought tomato granules. Alternatively, fresh zucchini will keep for up to five days in the centre of your pack and is easily cooked in the field.

½ cup of red lentils
1 teaspoon of oil
2 cloves of garlic
½ teaspoon of turmeric
2 dried red chillies
½ teaspoon of mustard seeds
½ teaspoon of cumin seeds
1 teaspoon of salt
2 teaspoons of tomato paste
1 small zucchini

AT HOME

Pack the turmeric, mustard, cumin seeds and dried chillies together.

IN THE FIELD

Heat the oil in a large pot and fry finely chopped garlic and spices until the garlic starts to brown. Add two cups of water, lentils, tomato paste and zucchini. Bring to the boil and let simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Once cooked, cover and let stand for five minutes, then stir through salt and serve over rice or with unleavened bread.

Read our food dehydrator review in *Wild* issue 132.

Kangaroo Island



The view from Weira Cove to the Cape du Couedic lighthouse
Photo: Megan Blandford

South Australia's Kangaroo Island offers plenty of short walks that are easy enough for the whole family. *Megan Blandford* details five of her favourites

The wilderness haven of Kangaroo Island, or K.I. to the locals, abounds with short walks and day hikes. Native plants, birds and an abundance of wildlife contribute to the island's stunning natural beauty of red dirt and glorious beaches. It's like the desert with added ocean views.

In modern terms, this place came to be in 1802 when Matthew Flinders first spotted the island and named it for the animals seen hopping around as he approached. Just one month later, French explorer Nicolas Baudin came to K.I. – hence the combination of British and French names around the island.

Since then, K.I. has been a place of refuge for escaped convicts and

runaway sailors, transforming to post-war farmland and the site of many shipwrecks and remote lifestyles.

These days the island is dotted with farms, vineyards, fine food producers and national parks, and with its main industries being agriculture and tourism, it is the perfect place to explore.

It's easy to get around by car after arriving by ferry into the village of Penneshaw on K.I.'s east coast. At 155 kilometres from east to west and 55 kilometres north to south, with roads mostly sealed, it isn't hard to cover a lot of ground. The locals are helpful, roads and walking tracks well signed and visitor information easy to come by. The truth, however, is that you

simply haven't seen K.I. until your feet have hit a walking track.

The ferry leaves from Cape Jervis several times each day and takes 45 minutes. You can expect to pay around \$400 return (sealink.com.au) for a family of four and vehicle. From the Flinders Chase Visitor Centre, drive nine kilometres along West Bay Road until you see the signs to Snake Lagoon. National park entry fees apply. South Australia is our country's driest state so ensure you carry plenty of drinking water. You'll find everything you need at Penneshaw and Kingscote, but supplies are few and far between otherwise.

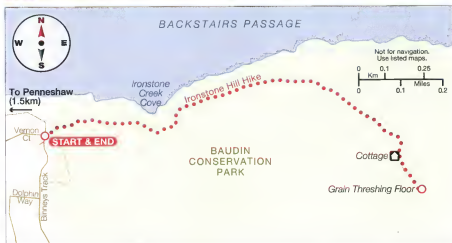
tourkangarooisland.com.au

IRONSTONE HILL

**DISTANCE:** 4km**TIME:** 1.5hrs**START/FINISH:** Binneys Track near Penneshaw**ACCESS:** Follow Frenchmans Terrace along Penneshaw's foreshore to the signposted car park.

This walk along the coast east of Penneshaw is a great introduction to the island. Starting out on the original bullock track that was used in the 1850s for transporting farm produce, continue up the hill and read the signs dotted along the cliff-top track for a narrative of the area's history. You'll discover, for example, that 19th-century cereal farmer and postmaster Harry Bates carted his produce this way to his boat and over to Adelaide. Wind your way along the dirt track to the top of Ironstone Hill and the ruins of Harry's cottage, which still houses farming equipment and the stone threshing floor.

Dolphin pods can often be seen cruising in the bay from here, and wallabies are likely to be watching you from their camouflaged hiding spots in the bushland.

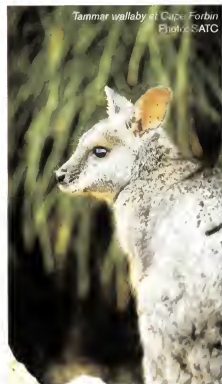


CURLEY CREEK

**DISTANCE:** 11km**TIME:** 4hrs**START/FINISH:** Curley Creek**ACCESS:** Curley Creek is 6km from the Murray Lagoon park office (off Seagers Road), or the track can be taken from the Bald Hill Walk 2km from the office.

Following the island's largest freshwater lagoon around the Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park, this dirt and grass

track—an old fire access road—is the ideal spot for those seeking tranquility. There are a couple of other walks around this area, but this is the longest one with the best outlook. Walk from Curley Creek to Bald Hill and back, following Murray Lagoon the whole way. Swans, plovers, ducks, pelicans, ibises and various migrants from the Siberian winter will keep birders busy. Murray Lagoon is best seen from the slight rise at Bald Hill—a view that you'll never forget, through the tall grass to the wetlands.



DISTANCE: 3km**TIME:** 50mins**START/FINISH:** Cape du Couedic on K.I.'s south-west coast**ACCESS:** The hike begins and ends at the shelter by the lighthouse sign.

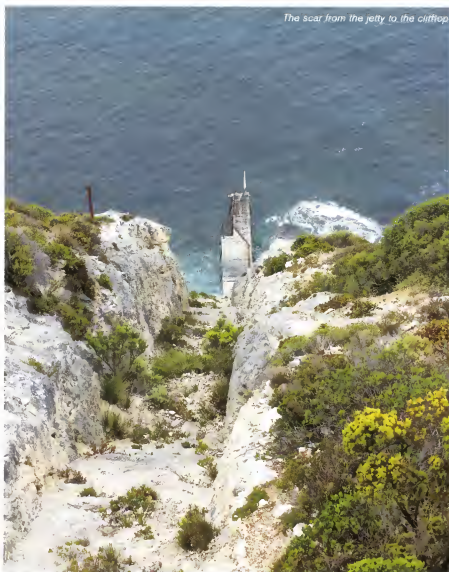
If you've already been to see the Remarkable Rocks in Flinders Chase National Park by this stage, you'll have some insight into the history of this walk. In the early 1900s the only way to get supplies to the lighthouse keeper was by boat from the mainland. To get the gear to the top of the remote cliff, settlers developed a type of flying fox contraption up the cliff face (the 'scar' of which is still visible from the Remarkable Rocks). The coastal view is stunning on the sandy track between the lighthouse and Weirs Cove.

Consider just how tough and lonely it would have been had your career choice been that of lighthouse keeper in the late 1800s.

Another coastal option to consider is the Kelly Hill to Hanson Bay hike (nine kilometres one way), which features some interesting coastal vegetation.

Did you know?

The Remarkable Rocks were formed in the post-Cambrian period around 500 million years ago. The weather-sculpted boulders, which appear precariously balanced, sit on a granite crest that drops 75 metres to the sea.



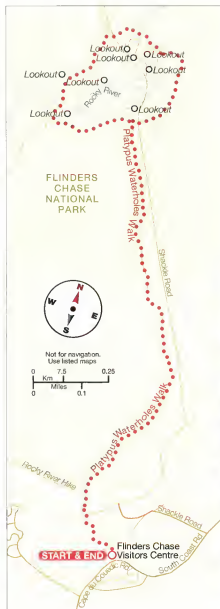
The scar from the jetty to the clifftop



PLATYPUS WATERHOLES WALK

DISTANCE: 4.5km**TIME:** 2hrs**START/FINISH:** Flinders Chase Visitor Centre**ACCESS:** Outside business hours, enter the walk via the gate alongside the visitor centre.

An easy one for families, this is best undertaken first thing in the morning or close to dusk if you want to spot the curious critters that give the walk its name. After walking through the sparse open lands and along the red rocky bushland track you wind up at the waterhole (or waterholes, depending on recent rainfalls). It's not just the platypus you might see here; koalas, echidnas, wallabies and kangaroos also call the area home. If you're keen for a longer walk, you can add the adjoining nine-kilometre Rocky River hike.



SNAKE LAGOON HIKE

DISTANCE: 4km**TIME:** 2hrs**START/FINISH:** Snake Lagoon car park near the Snake Lagoon campsite.

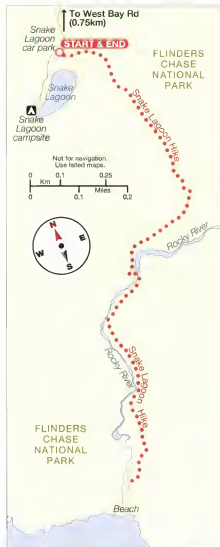
If you only do one walk on K.I. this should be it, though it's rivalled by the Ravine des Casoars. Some describe the first half of the Snake Lagoon Hike as ho-hum, but the track in its entirety gives you a summary of K.I.'s walls of vegetation, wildlife, sandy tracks, dry rivers and sublime coastal scenery.

Get ready for some scrambling, as the dirt track soon opens up to the dry Rocky River. Incidentally, the Rocky River is one of Australia's most pristine water catchments as it's entirely contained within Flinders Chase National Park. Kangaroos abound and lizards can be spotted sunning themselves on the rocks. It's usually dry but when wet, snakes come out to feast on frogs.

To finish, you're treated to the view of a lifetime on a pristine white sandy beach. For the best seaside experience, do this hike first thing in the morning after camping at Snake Lagoon so your footprints are the only ones in sight.



Information on other Kangaroo Island short walks, moderate hikes and multi-day treks can be found at wild.com.au



A koala dozes on the Platypus Waterholes Walk

Techno Logic

With free outdoor adventure apps hitting the digital marketplace faster than you can say iPhone 6, *Wild* sifts the wheat from the smartphone-optimised chaff



EXPLORE GRAMPIANS

Grampians Tourism Board (iPhone iOS 5.0)

Launched last year, this is a well-made app that's very easy to navigate and integrated with Facebook and Twitter throughout so you can easily share photos from your Grampians jaunts. The 'add to trip' function is useful as you click through the 'top five' section, which covers things like waterfalls and rock art sites, but the text is too brief and superficial to use as a genuine planning tool. Although the driving directions, short wildflower guide and click-to-call functionality are nice touches, this app doesn't offer anything in the way of track notes for serious hikes and the 'local secrets' section could do with bulking up. If you can spare the megabytes, this is an enjoyable Friday afternoon distraction but don't expect to uncover anything new about the region.



THE WEST MACS

Tourism NT (iPhone iOS 3.1)

After an opening montage of bushwalking eye candy, this app offers up a series of two-minute video stories told by local experts on the nature, art, history and culture of the West MacDonnell Ranges. This audiovisual approach, which replicates the Northern Territory Government website, is more successful in inspiring you to set off for the Larapinta Trail than other more complex or wordy tourism-orientated apps, though it would have been even better if the map links directed you to a topographical map rather than a basic illustration. This app details plenty of points of interest and it would be enjoyable to listen to the interweaving viewpoints of a historian, ranger and artist while actually at Ellery Creek or Redbank Gorge, but it's lacking a 'things to do' section and key contacts.

INSPIRING GIPPSLAND WALKS

Michael Legg (iPhone iOS 3.2)

The satellite map capability more than justifies the downloading of this app, which features 40 walks graded from one to four in difficulty. Each walk snippet covers important things like whether you need a permit and which areas might be affected by heavy rain, and the images are high quality. The 'latest park information' tab was a dead link when we tested, however, and the pop-up summaries of national parks could do with being longer and less promotional. The link to Google Maps makes this a handy tool for plotting your next multi-day hike or car camping trip through the region, with most of the walks situated in east Gippsland, but it's a shame you're not able to filter results by walk difficulty. It's helpful to have clickable links to weather and bushfire websites all in one place but I'm not sure why you'd ever need the randomising 'shake' feature for choosing a route.



60 GREAT SHORT WALKS TASMANIA

Tasmania Parks & Wildlife Service (iPhone iOS 5)

Released last year, this guide to Tasmanian day walks is set to gain full GPS integration and interpretive details (plus a price tag) in future versions but is certainly worth a look in its current state. Walks featured are mostly around the 90-minute mark but tracks as short as the 20-minute circuit of Cape Tourville and as long as eight hours on Cradle Mountain get a mention. Bushwalker anecdotes and an extensive image gallery separate this app from the masses, as do the tips on preserving biodiversity, and the note-taking option is a nice feature. It would be good to have recommendations for joining walks together and more details on what you can expect to see, but for the time-poor visitor to Tasmania and its 2,000 kilometres of tracks this is a handy pocket guide.

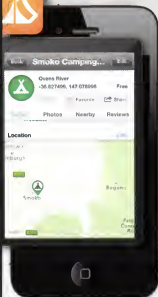




CAMPPEE

Si Xia (iPhone iOS 6.1)

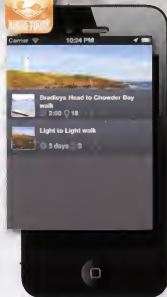
This community-powered app pinpoints more than 8,000 campsites and caravan parks around Australia, and is naturally varying in quality of information as a result. You can sign in via your Facebook account to add or edit information about a camping spot, and search for nearby sites via facilities like mobile phone coverage or 'pleasant scenery'. We found it annoying that Victoria in British Columbia popped up as we searched for a location nearby despite having specified Australia on sign-in, and that it repeatedly asked to update the database. Most listings are yet to receive reviews or images but the option of inviting a friend to a campsite via Facebook is quite fun.



NSW NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICES AUDIO TOURS

NSW NPWS (5.0 iPhone / Android 2.3)

This new app only featured two self-guided tours on release but has potential. After downloading the audio files for use offline, the telephone-voice narrator can take you on a two-hour ramble from Bradleys Head and Chowder Bay in Sydney or on a three-day bushwalk in Ben Boyd National Park. Besides the colourful maps, the app acts simply as a file transfer service rather than something to return to.



COMMANDER COMPASS LITE PAVEL AHAFONAU

(iPhone iOS 4.3, Android 2.2)

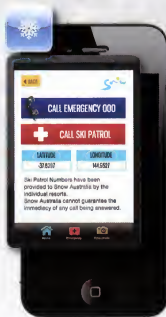
This 3D navigation app has proved popular with geocachers for its ability to tag multiple locations and a combination of satellite map, GPS tracker, speedometer, gyro horizon, inclinometer and milspec compass. Using the geolocation function of your smartphone will obviously sap your battery but tracking the sun and stars with military precision definitely makes this worth a play before investing in a handheld GPS.



SNOW AUSTRALIA

Kamasian Digital (iPhone iOS 5)

Aimed at beginner skiers, this professional-looking app features basic information on necessary gear and retro-looking videos covering accommodation options but barely scrapes the surface of safety considerations or route planning. The table comparing slope difficulty and heights in Australia's nine resorts is not as useful as a forecast and I would have expected the resort names to link to individual websites. The clickable emergency numbers and geolocation feature are great ideas though (presuming you get mobile phone coverage on the mountain) and young families will enjoy the photo-sharing section. A few tabs seem unfinished or include typos but we're keeping fingers crossed for cross-country content in future versions.





MY ENVIRONMENT

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (iPhone iOS 5)

For a government app, this is surprisingly user-friendly. The address or 'current location' search function allows you to find out about all the protected areas and species situated in a particular location within a couple of clicks. The information on endangered and invasive species of animals and plants is extensive, with hyperlinks to further reading, but some of the national park listings directed us to a 'no details' web page. More images of flora and fauna would make this more enjoyable to use in the field and we don't see the point of the glitchy news tab, but this is an impressive factfile to fit in your pocket.



THE MICHAEL MORCOMBE AND DAVID STEWART EGIDE TO THE BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA LITE

My Digital Earth (iPhone iOS 4.3)

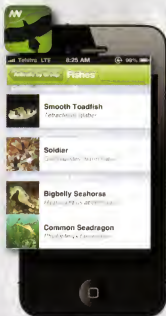
Before investing the paid-for app you can use this abbreviated version (featuring 59 of the full 790 species) to work out whether it's time to ditch those hefty printed field guides. Recently updated to enable you to save GPS coordinates to your list of sightings, the speed at which you can search by physical similarities to other species and compare two bird illustrations on the same screen is excellent. To have bird call recordings at your finger tips and be able to store photos and enlarge illustrations is also useful, but it would be good if social media sharing was enabled and some users will find it hard to get used to the crammed screen.

FIELD GUIDE TO VICTORIAN FAUNA

Museum Victoria

(iPhone iOS 4.3 / Android 2.2)

Featuring audio recordings, images, distribution maps and factfiles for more than 700 species, this app (newly released on Android) is a dynamic tool for teaching children about the native and vagrant animals of Victoria. There are plenty of species missing of course, and there's less information than found in the similar My Environment app, but its offline usability and links to external websites will greatly benefit citizen scientists.



SAS SURVIVAL GUIDE LITE

Trellisys.net (iPhone iOS 4.3 / Android 2.2)

This taster app may not be targeted at an Australian audience but the tips, case studies and quiz questions taken from the bestselling book of British survivalist John Wiseman come in handy for entertainment around camp, even if some of the first aid advice is dated. Tips on things like finding water, navigating by the stars and edible vegetation are augmented by videos and 'how-to' slideshows but you need to upgrade to the paid-for version for the morse code signalling functionality and the other eight chapters of the guide.

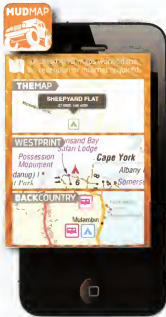


Three apps worth paying for



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S EPHEMERIS (\$9.49)

Shows you the angle of the sun and moon at any time of day in any location so you can plan your adventures around the best time to shoot.



MUDMAPS 2 (\$149.99)

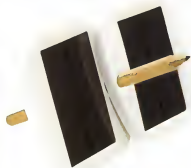
Combines detailed offline 4WD maps with the Campee directory, including track notes and free monthly updates.



GOSKYWATCH PLANETARIUM (\$1.99)

Uses your phone's camera to identify stars and planets, with a magnifier function and database of constellation myths.

App-friendly gear



The portable Solio Bolt Charger, which weighs around 150 grams and holds up to 2000 milliampere-hours, can juice up a dead smartphone via USB in under 90 minutes. By inserting a pencil through the central pivot point of the device and rotating it until the pencil no longer casts a shadow it can maximise solar capture, while the lithium ion-polymer battery is unaffected by strong heat. \$95; zenimports.com.au

The latest iPhone protection from eCase features a waterproof headphone jack as well as the low-profile Sealock zip, lash points and touchscreen compatibility. Submersible cases are also available for Samsung, Motorola, HTC and BlackBerry smartphones. From \$29.95; spelean.com.au



The Biolite camp stove comes equipped with a thermoelectric generator and USB port so you can charge your smartphone while cooking. The wood fire needs to be kept hot to emit charge. \$229.95; seastosummitdistribution.com.au



The Switch 8 solar recharger, which is only the size of a roll of one dollar coins, can return USB-compatible smartphones to full battery in one hour and be paired with the Nomad 7 Solar Panel for longer trips. \$49; goalzero.com.au



Directory

The Wild Directory is a comprehensive reference point for international outdoors-related businesses. You can list your firm for only \$48 an issue (\$58 in spot red).

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 gary@shupco.com.au
 Ph: 03 9690 8795

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 Kew East, VIC 3102
 Ph: 03 9857 0110

K2 Base Camp
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 Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006
 Ph: 07 3854 1340

Macpac
 macpac.co.nz
 Ph: 1800 128 504

Mountain Equipment
 491 Kent St
 Sydney, NSW 2000
 Fax: 02 9264 2645

Outdoor Shack
 1131 Pittwater Rd
 Collaroy Beach, NSW 2097
 outdoorshack.com.au

Prime Creative Media
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 South Melbourne 3205
 Ph: 03 9690 8766

Snowgum Australia Pty Ltd
 snowgum.com.au
 Ph: 1800 811 312

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 camphikeclimb.com.au

Mountain Equipment
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 Chatswood 2067
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Mountain Equipment
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 Sydney 2000
 Ph: 02 9264 5888

Trek & Travel
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 Ph: 02 9261 3435

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 Darwin 0800
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 Ph: 03 6331 3644

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 Ph: 03 9600 0599
 bogong.com.au

Canoes Plus Pty Ltd
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 Ph: 03 9857 0110

The Wilderness Shop Pty Ltd
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 E: info@wildernessshop.com.au
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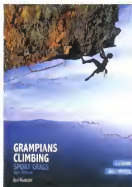
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GRAMPIANS CLIMBING: SPORTS CRAGS By Neil Monteith
 (Onsight Photography and Publishing, 2013, \$46.95)

My word this is a good book. Beautifully edited and refined into a power-packed super punch of concentrated climbing beta, it's actually amazing how its generous abundance has all been packed into such a smallish pocket-sized compendium. It has an encyclopaedic amount of content. Everything and every climbing body seem to have added their wisdom. More power to Neil Monteith

and his publishers, for *Grampians Climbing* is obviously a carefully delivered jewel of a thing - an essential value-packed guide to Australia's most fabled climbing region. The history of the region at large and then, drilling down, the seven specific areas form an engaging and logical introduction. Each of the seven's routes are then succinctly outlined and explained via written descriptions and a beautifully conceived legend. Essential. A treat to behold - every climber should want one.

Review by Aaron Flanagan



FERAL By George Monbiot
(Penguin, 2013, \$39.99)

British eco-journalist George Monbiot has gone 'feral' when we first meet him in this provocative back-to-nature narrative, munching on live grubs and distancing himself from killjoy conservationists who seek to freeze living ecosystems in time 'like a jar of pickles'. His quest for a 'rawer, wilder' life in north Wales is joined to the proposition that parts of the world be 'rewilded' for the reenergisation rather than exclusion of humans. This involves letting natural ecological processes resume

in wilderness areas like the 'sheepwrecked' Cambrian Mountains and reintroducing a few species long extinct in Britain such as wolves, bison and, ultimately, elephants. But while much of this hyperbolic text has you smiling at signs that rewilding is already underway, parts that suggest socially engineering alternative careers for hill farmers or reveal our admiration for wild beasts in tributes to a fugitive gunman don't quite sit right. If you can stomach Monbiot's heroic tone, this is a biological and ecological treasure trove that raises interesting questions about the ideology of wilderness and who owns the landscape.



ON THE TRAIL OF GENGHIS KHAN
By Tim Cope (Bloomsbury, 2013, \$29.99)

Considering Aussie adventurer Tim Cope could barely ride a horse before he set off on a 10,000-kilometre quest across the Eurasian Steppe aged 25, the most inspiring aspect of this evocative and well-researched account is the way he earns the respect and gleans stories from the people he meets. Even if you've seen the 2010 documentary series about Cope's three-year journey through wolf-infested plateaux, the scorching Kazakh desert and glaciated Altai Mountains,

you'll be overwhelmed by his resilience in the face of horse thieves, a faulty GPS and hypothermia, and share his excitement when he discovers an 800-year-old army campsite. This doorstop-sized book seems timely, with hints at the mining booms to come and further shake beliefs that the modern sedentary age is just a phase for the horseback nomads. It also makes you smile though, when Cope's macho posturing is undermined by his canine companion for instance, and highlights that the desert you imagine the region to be is in fact a collection of age-old grazing lands dissected by the invisible borders of different clans.



THE NATURE MAGPIE by Daniel Allen
(Allen & Unwin, 2013, \$29.99)

This compendium of quirky facts and anecdotes about the natural world looks and reads like a toilet book, with brief but regularly amusing chapters about such topics as the importance of whale sick to the perfume industry and how to react when attacked by either a black or grizzly bear. Although the 'otherworldly, eclectic, unlikely' wildlife of Australia gets a few mentions, the content is largely UK-centric and Allen's personal favourite - the otter - gets the most attention.

The quotes of famous naturalists and poets which are dispersed throughout are brilliant but you would almost prefer the author devote more space to research into the feelings of plants, Tasmania's hallucinating wallabies and the impact of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. The phonetic rendering of birdsong and dummy's guide to volcanoes made me smile as much as snippets on the kakapo's rise to world fame and recently discovered Spongebob Squarepants mushroom, and Allen's accessible style ensures even serious sections, on the plight of the tiger for example, are enjoyable.



TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
Dir. Lisa Diener
(Tellitonthemountain.com, 2013, \$25)

This independent documentary film follows a diverse bunch of bushwalkers from different parts of the world as they attempt to thru-hike the 4,286-kilometre Pacific Crest Trail that runs from the Mexico to Canada. The 'set design by Mother Nature' is a big reason to watch but the quality of the footage does vary between shaky video diaries. Talking-head sections with charismatic veteran hiker Billygoat are annoyingly overshadowed

by handheld footage of a young couple dealing with blisters and trying to plan their wedding from the trail, but it's the incredible commitment of yo-yo hiker Scott Williamson that stays with you. Intercutting the injury that separates one couple with the heartwarming endeavours of the 'trail angels', and the terrors of the mountain passes with close encounters with wildlife, this film offers privileged insight into a challenge that fewer people have completed than have climbed Everest. Between a cheesy opening and 'where are they now' ending, this is a fascinating look at addition to walking and wilderness.

Indigenous tourism champion Sonya Jeffrey tells *Wild* about growing up in Far North Queensland, walking ancient trails and the thrill of kayaking

Growing up in a rural community in Far North Queensland, the daughter of a Jirrbal elder, I spent my entire childhood outdoors. That's what sparked my interest in learning more about my culture and how my people are connected to the bush.

I never had the opportunity to meet my grandmother, Chloe Grant, but she's the reason our family's culture still exists. She escaped from the Hull River Aboriginal settlement into the rainforest when a cyclone came through in 1918, killing around 400 people. I tell her story on our walks, how she made sure our language and knowledge survived.

I've had a passion for tourism since high school, for experiencing beautiful places and different cultures. I did my traineeship at Harvey World Travel in Tully, then worked for Raging Thunder Adventures in Cairns before moving to Sydney.

I was desperately missing home when my father, who created the Holistic Planning and Teaching Framework now used by the Queensland Education Department, told me about a walking track he had reopened along an Aboriginal trading route. As an Aboriginal woman, brought up in the bush, I longed to connect with nature again, and was excited by the idea of taking children out on country to see the environment through Indigenous eyes.

When I moved back, I joined Dad in his partnership with Echo Creek Adventure Centre, which offers cultural workshops and rainforest walks. In early 2009, we launched Ingan Tours and the trading route became our flagship Spirit of the Rainforest walk.

The trail is in the same state it was 1,000 years ago – we've not brought in any of the signs you'd typically see on a national park route so as to keep it authentic – and the evidence of our ancestors is plain to see. For instance, our people knew how to leech the toxins out of the fruit of the cycad and black bean plants and would climb tall zamia palms to get the nut at the top. When I see the footholds my ancestors cut into the tree trunk with their stone axes, though the trees have healed, I get goosebumps. I love showing people these signs of our connection to the land; that they are literally walking in the footsteps of my ancestors. Aboriginal people never rushed anything so we give ourselves two hours to reach Echo Creek Falls, and to make sure we have minimal impact on the area we limit walks to three days a week and a maximum group size of 15.

We've come a long way, with the help of Indigenous Business Australia, but I want to grow the business bigger and better. It's not about being commercial, I want to share the insights that we have into this environment with others. The Jirrbal people are representative survivors of one of the five rainforest tribes within the Cassowary Coast region, and the knowledge we can share is just one fragment of more than 240 indigenous Australian cultures.

Last June, I was telling my niece about the fun we had as kids floating down Bulgan Creek in old tractor tyre tubes in flood season and she suggested we invest in a couple of sit-on-top kayaks. When we went for our first paddle we were blown away by the crystal clear water and birdlife on the creek, so we started mapping out a new tour that other families could enjoy together. It had been 15 years since I'd floated down the creek so I was overwhelmed by the azure kingfishers, sea eagles, turtles and kookaburras.

There's a lot of planning that goes into an adventure tour, from remote area first aid and deep water rescue training to council approval of the entry point. Staff from Tourism Queensland and the Wet Tropics Management Authority that we've taken out have been astonished by what's in our backyard, and my hope is that our tours encourage more people visiting the Cassowary Coast to stop at Tully for a nature-based experience. Since we officially launched the kayak tour in January I've had lots of local people stop me in the street to say thank-you. Myself and the other guides now fight over who gets to lead the kayak tours.

Next, I'm looking into a suitable campsite where we could offer two or three eco tents for overnight visitors. Our clientele is about 60 per cent international tourists, but even the visitors we get from across Australia are amazed at the landscape and what we know about it. So many people have lost their connection with nature; I watch stressed Europeans sit in one of our kayaks with their shoulders rigid, then the creek does the talking and you see their whole body relax.

If I want to relax or so do some thinking I head to Bingli Bay or the Alligators Nest swimming hole within the national park, and I love nothing more than heading down to the river for a cool swim and a billy tea and just whiling away the day. Running a small business takes a lot of time and energy but I've planned my next adventure: 'jungle surfing' on a zip-line tour of the Daintree rainforest. I'm right into kayaking now – it's such a stress-buster – and one of my dreams is to go sea kayaking in Alaska. I've been fascinated by Inuit culture ever since I visited Skagway in the 90s.



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